

The Academic Phrasebank is a general resource for academic writers. It makes explicit the more common phraseological ‘nuts and bolts’ of academic writing.

# Academic Phrasebank

A compendium of commonly used phrasal elements in academic English in PDF format

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# PDF Download version

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### Preface

The Academic Phrasebank is a general resource for academic writers. It aims to provide the phraseological ‘nuts and bolts’ of academic writing organised according to the main sections of a research paper or dissertation. Other phrases are listed under the more general communicative functions of academic writing.

The resource was designed primarily for academic and scientific writers who are non-native speakers of English. However, native speaker writers may still find much of the material helpful. In fact, recent data suggests that the majority of users are native speakers of English.

The phrases, and the headings under which they are listed, can be used simply to assist you in thinking about the content and organisation of your own writing, or the phrases can be incorporated into your writing where this is appropriate. In most cases, a certain amount of creativity and adaptation will be necessary when a phrase is used.

The Academic Phrasebank is not discipline specific. Nevertheless, it should be particularly useful for writers who need to report their empirical studies. The phrases are content neutral and generic in nature; in using them, therefore, you are not stealing other people's ideas and this does not constitute plagiarism.

In the current PDF version, additional material, which is not phraseological, has been incorporated. These additional sections should be helpful to you as a writer.

## **Contents**

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Introduction: About Academic Phrasebank | 4 - 5 |
|---|-------|

### **Major Sections**

|                         |         |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Introducing work        | 7 – 12  |
| Referring to literature | 13 - 18 |
| Describing methods      | 19 - 22 |
| Reporting results       | 23 - 26 |
| Discussing findings     | 27 - 30 |
| Writing conclusions     | 31 - 34 |

### **General Functions**

|                            |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Being critical             | 36 - 38 |
| Being cautious             | 39 - 41 |
| Classifying and listing    | 42 - 43 |
| Compare and contrast       | 44 - 45 |
| Defining terms             | 46 - 47 |
| Describing trends          | 48      |
| Describing quantities      | 49      |
| Explaining causality       | 50 - 51 |
| Giving examples as support | 52 - 53 |
| Signalling transition      | 54 - 55 |
| Writing about the past     | 56 - 57 |

### **Notes on Academic Writing**

|                          |         |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Academic style           | 59 - 61 |
| Commonly confused words  | 62 - 63 |
| British and US spelling  | 64      |
| Punctuation              | 65      |
| Using articles           | 66 - 67 |
| Sentence structure       | 68 - 69 |
| Paragraph structure      | 70      |
| Helpful tips for writers | 71 - 72 |

## About Academic Phrasebank

### Theoretical Influences

The Academic Phrasebank largely draws on an approach to analysing academic texts originally pioneered by John Swales in the 1980s. Utilising a genre analysis approach to identify rhetorical patterns in the introductions to research articles, Swales defined a 'move' as a section of text that serves a specific communicative function (Swales, 1981, 1990). This unit of rhetorical analysis is used as one of the main organising sub-categories of the Academic Phrasebank. Swales not only identified commonly-used moves in article introductions, but he was interested in showing the kind of language which was used to achieve the communicative purpose of each move. Much of this language was phraseological in nature.

The resource also draws upon psycholinguistic insights into how language is learnt and produced. It is now accepted that much of the language we use is phraseological in nature; that it is acquired, stored and retrieved as pre-formulated constructions (Bolinger, 1976; Pawley and Syder, 1983). These insights began to be supported empirically as computer technology permitted the identification of recurrent phraseological patterns in very large corpora of spoken and written English using specialised software (e.g. Sinclair, 1991). Phrasebank recognises that there is an important phraseological dimension to academic language and attempts to make examples of this explicit.

### Sources of the phrases

The vast majority of phrases in this resource have been taken from authentic academic sources. The original corpus from which the phrases were 'harvested' consisted of 100 postgraduate dissertations completed at the University of Manchester. However, phrases from academic articles drawn from a broad spectrum of disciplines have also been, and continue to be, incorporated. In most cases, the phrases have been simplified and where necessary they have been 'sifted' from their particularised academic content. Where content words have been included for exemplificatory purposes, these are substitutions of the original words. In selecting a phrase for inclusion into the Academic Phrasebank, the following questions are asked:

- does it serve a useful communicative purpose in academic text?
- does it contain collocational and/or formulaic elements?
- are the content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives) generic in nature?
- does the combination 'sound natural' to a native speaker or writer of English?

### When is it acceptable to reuse phrases in academic writing?

In a recent study (Davis and Morley, 2013), 45 academics from two British universities were surveyed to determine whether reusing phrases was a legitimate activity for academic writers, and if so, what kind of phrases could be reused. From the survey and later from in-depth interviews, the following characteristics for acceptability emerged. A reused phrase:

- should not have a unique or original construction;
- should not express a clear point of view of another writer;
- depending on the phrase, may be up to nine words in length; beyond this 'acceptability' declines;
- may contain up to four generic content words (nouns, verbs or adjectives which are not bound to a specific disciplinary domain).

Some of the entries in the Academic Phrasebank, contain specific content words which have been included for illustrative purposes. These words should be substituted when the phrases are used. In the phrases below, for example, the content words in bold should be substituted:

- X is a major **public health** problem, and the cause of .....
- X is the leading cause of death in **western-industrialised countries**.

The many thousands of disciplinary-specific phrases which can be found in academic communication comprise a separate category of phrases. These tend to be shorter than the generic phrases listed in Academic Phrasebank, and typically consist of noun phrases or combinations of these. Acceptability for reusing these is determined by the extent to which they are used and understood by members of a particular academic community.

### Further work

Development of the website content is ongoing. In addition, research is currently being carried out on the ways in which experienced and less-experienced writers make use of the Academic Phrasebank. Another project is seeking to find out more about ways in which teachers of English for academic purposes make use of this resource.

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# **Major sections**

## **Writing Introductions**

There are many ways to introduce an academic essay or short paper. Most academic writers, however, appear to do one or more of the following in their introductions:

- establish the context, background and/or importance of the topic
- indicate an issue, problem, or controversy in the field of study
- define the topic or key terms
- state of the purpose of the essay/writing
- provide an overview of the coverage and/or structure of the writing

Introductions to research articles and dissertations tend to be relatively short but quite complex. Some of the more common moves include:

- establishing the context, background and/or importance of the topic
- giving a brief synopsis of the relevant literature
- indicating a problem, controversy or a knowledge gap in the field of study
- establishing the desirability of the research
- listing the research questions or hypotheses
- providing a synopsis of the research method(s)
- explaining the significance or value of the study
- defining certain key terms
- providing an overview of the dissertation or report structure
- explaining reasons for the writer's personal interest in the topic

Examples of phrases which are commonly employed to realise these functions are listed below. Note that there may be a certain amount of overlap between some of the categories under which the phrases are listed.

### **Establishing the importance of the topic for the world or society**

X is a fundamental property of ....

X is fast becoming a key instrument in ....

X is a common disorder characterised by ....

X plays an important role in the maintenance of ....

Xs are the most potent anti-inflammatory agents known.

X is a major public health problem, and the main cause of ....

Xs are one of the most rapidly declining groups of insects in ....

In the new global economy, X has become a central issue for ....

X is the leading cause of death in western-industrialised countries.

Xs are one of the most widely used groups of antibacterial agents and ....

X is increasingly recognised as a serious, worldwide public health concern.

X is an important component in the climate system, and plays a key role in Y.

In the history of development economics, X has been thought of as a key factor in ....

### **Establishing the importance of the topic for the discipline**

A key aspect of X is ....

X is a classic problem in ....

A primary concern of X is ....

X is at the heart of our understanding of ....

X is an increasingly important area in applied linguistics.

Investigating X is a continuing concern within ....  
Central to the entire discipline of X is the concept of ....  
X and Y have been an object of research since the 1960s  
X is a major area of interest within the field of ....  
The issue of X has received considerable critical attention.  
X has been studied by many researchers using ....  
One of the most significant current discussions in legal and moral philosophy is ...

### **Establishing the importance of the topic (time frame given)**

One of the most important events of the 1970s was ....  
Traditionally, Xs have subscribed to the belief that ....  
Recent developments in X have heightened the need for ....  
In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in ....  
Recent trends in X have led to a proliferation of studies that ....  
Recent developments in the field of X have led to a renewed interest in ....  
Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in ....  
The past decade has seen the rapid development of X in many ....  
The past thirty years have seen increasingly rapid advances in the field of ....  
Over the past century there has been a dramatic increase in ....  
X proved an important literary genre in the early Y community.  
The changes experienced by Xs over the past decade remain unprecedented.  
Xs are one of the most widely used groups of Y and have been extensively used for ....

### **Synopsis of literature**

Previous studies have reported ....  
Recent evidence suggests that ....  
Several attempts have been made to ....  
Studies of X show the importance of ....  
A number of researchers have reported ....  
Recently investigators have examined the effects of X on Y.  
Factors found to be influencing X have been explored in several studies.  
In the past two decades a number of researchers have sought to determine ....  
A considerable amount of literature has been published on X. These studies ....  
Surveys such as that conducted by Smith (1988) showed that ....  
The first serious discussions and analyses of X emerged during the 1970s with ....  
There have been a number of longitudinal studies involving X that have reported ....  
Xs were reported in the first models of Y (e.g., Smith, 1977; Smith and Patel, 1977).  
What we know about X is largely based upon empirical studies that investigate how ....  
Smith (1984: 217) shows how, in the past, research into X was mainly concerned with ....

### **Highlighting a problem**

However, a major problem with this kind of application is ....  
Lack of X has existed as a health problem for many years.  
However, these rapid changes are having a serious effect on ....  
Despite its safety and efficacy, X suffers from several major drawbacks:  
However, research has consistently shown that these students lack ....  
There is increasing concern that some Xs are being disadvantaged ....  
Despite its long clinical success, X has a number of problems in use.  
Questions have been raised about the safety of prolonged use of ....  
Along with this growth in X, however, there is increasing concern over ....

### **Highlighting a controversy in the field of study**

To date there has been little agreement on what ....  
One major issue in early X research concerned ....  
The issue has grown in importance in light of recent ....  
One observer has already drawn attention to the paradox in ....  
Questions have been raised about the safety of prolonged use of ....  
Debate continues about the best strategies for the management of ....  
In many Xs, a debate is taking place between Ys and Zs concerning ....  
This concept has recently been challenged by X studies demonstrating ....  
The debate about X has gained fresh prominence with many arguing that ....  
More recently, literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings about ....  
One of the most significant current discussions in legal and moral philosophy is ....  
One major theoretical issue that has dominated the field for many years concerns ....  
The controversy about scientific evidence for X has raged unabated for over a century.  
The causes of X have been the subject of intense debate within the scientific community.  
The issue of X has been a controversial and much disputed subject within the field of ....  
In the literature on X, the relative importance of Y has been subject to considerable debate.

### **Highlighting inadequacies of previous studies**

Researchers have not treated X in much detail.  
Previous studies of X have not dealt with ....  
Half of the studies evaluated failed to specify whether ....  
Most studies in the field of X have only focused on ....  
Most studies in X have only been carried out in a small number of areas.  
The generalisability of much published research on this issue is problematic.  
The experimental data are rather controversial, and there is no general agreement about ....  
Such expositions are unsatisfactory because they ....  
The research to date has tended to focus on X rather than Y.  
Research on the subject has been mostly restricted to limited comparisons of ....  
The existing accounts fail to resolve the contradiction between X and Y.  
  
However, few writers have been able to draw on any systematic research into ....  
However, much of the research up to now has been descriptive in nature ....  
However, these results were based upon data from over 30 years ago and it is unclear if ....  
Although extensive research has been carried out on X, no single study exists which ....  
X's analysis does not take account of .... nor does she examine ....

### **Highlighting a knowledge gap in the field of study**

What is not yet clear is the impact of X on ....  
No previous study has investigated X .  
There has been little quantitative analysis of ....  
The neurobiological basis of this X is poorly understood.  
Until recently, there has been no reliable evidence that ....  
In addition, no research has been found that surveyed ....  
Little is known about X and it is not clear what factors ....  
This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of X that exist among ....  
  
So far this method has only been applied to ....  
So far, however, there has been little discussion about ....  
However, far too little attention has been paid to ....  
However, the evidence for this relationship is inconclusive ....  
However, much uncertainty still exists about the relation between ....

However, there have been no controlled studies which compare differences in ....  
In contrast, very little is known about X in non-mammalian vertebrates and in ....

|                             |   |   |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Although<br>While<br>Whilst | some research has<br>been carried out on X, | no single study exists which ....<br>no studies have been found which ....<br>no controlled studies have been reported.<br>only two studies have attempted to investigate ....<br>the mechanism by which .... has not been established.<br>there have been few empirical investigations into .....<br>there is very little scientific understanding of .... |
|-----------------------------|---|---|

Apart from Smith (2014), there is a general lack of research in ....  
Despite this, very few studies have investigated the impact of X on ....  
Several studies have produced estimates of X (Smith, 2002; Jones, 2003), but there is still insufficient data for ....

#### **Indicating the focus, aim, argument of a short paper**

This paper contests the claim that ....  
This paper will review the research conducted on ....  
This paper will focus on/examine/give an account of ....  
This paper seeks to remedy these problems by analysing the literature of ....  
This paper examines the significance of X in the rise of ....  
This essay critically examines/discusses/traces ....

This account seeks to ....  
In this paper I argue that ....  
In the pages that follow, it will be argued that ....  
This paper attempts to show that ....  
In this essay, I attempt to defend the view that ....  
The central thesis of this paper is that ....  
The aim of the paper is to provide a conceptual theoretical framework based on....  
The purpose of this paper is to review recent research into the ....

#### **Stating the purpose of research**

The major objective of this study was to investigate .....  
The aim of this study was to clarify several aspects of ....  
The aim of this study is to investigate the differences between X and Y.  
The aim of this research project has therefore been to try and establish what ....  
The main aim of this investigation is to assess the doses and risks associated with ....  
The aim of this study is to shine new light on these debates through an examination of ....

The objectives of this research are to determine whether ....  
The main purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of ....  
This paper investigates the usefulness of ....  
This thesis intends to determine the extent to which .... and whether ....  
This thesis will examine the way in which the ....  
This research examines the emerging role of X in the context of ....  
This case study seeks to examine the changing nature of ....  
This dissertation seeks to explain the development of ....  
This dissertation aims to unravel some of the mysteries surrounding ....  
This study systematically reviews the data for..., aiming to provide ....

Part of the aim of this project is to develop software that is compatible with ....  
There are two primary aims of this study: 1. To investigate .... 2. To ascertain ....  
Drawing upon two stands of research into X, this study attempts to ....  
One purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which these factors were ....  
This study seeks to obtain data which will help to address these research gaps.  
This study therefore set out to assess the effect of X ...., and the effect of ....

### **Research questions or hypotheses**

The central question in this dissertation asks how ....  
This research seeks to address the following questions:  
In particular, this dissertation will examine six main research questions:  
The hypothesis that will be tested is that ....  
The key research question of this study was whether or not ....  
This study aimed to address the following research questions:  
Another question is whether ....

### **Synopsis of the research design, method, source(s) of data**

Five works will be examined, all of which ....  
Data for this study were collected using ....  
This dissertation follows a case-study design, with in-depth analysis of ....  
This study was exploratory and interpretative in nature.  
The approach to empirical research adopted for this study was one of ....  
The methodological approach taken in this study is a mixed methodology based on ....  
By employing qualitative modes of enquiry, I attempt to illuminate the ....  
This work takes the form of a case-study of the ....  
Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this investigation.  
A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in the data analysis.  
Qualitative and quantitative research designs were adopted to provide ....  
A holistic approach is utilised, integrating X, Y and Z material to establish ....  
The research data in this thesis is drawn from four main sources: ....  
The study was conducted in the form of a survey, with data being gathered via ....

### **Indicating significance**

This project provided an important opportunity to advance the understanding of .....  
This study provides an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge of ....  
This is the first study to undertake a longitudinal analysis of ....  
The findings should make an important contribution to the field of ....  
Therefore, this study makes a major contribution to research on X by demonstrating ....  
The study offers some important insights into ....  
This study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring ....  
There are several important areas where this study makes an original contribution to ....

### **Indicating limitations**

The thesis does not engage with ....  
Due to practical constraints, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of ....  
It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the ....  
The reader should bear in mind that the study is based on ....  
Another potential problem is that the scope of my thesis may be too broad.  
A full discussion of X lies beyond the scope of this study.

### **Giving reasons for personal Interest\***

My main reason for choosing this topic is personal interest.

I became interested in Xs after reading ....

This project was conceived during my time working for X. As a medical advisor, I witnessed ...

I have worked closely with X for many years and ....

It is my experience of working with X that has driven this research.

\* sometimes found in the humanities, and the applied human sciences

### **Outlining the structure**

The main questions/issues addressed in this paper are: a), b and c).

This paper has been divided into four parts. The first part deals with ....

The essay has been organised in the following way.

This paper reviews the evidence for ....

This paper begins by .... It will then go on to ....

The first section of this paper will examine ....

This paper first gives a brief overview of the recent history of X.

My thesis is composed of four themed chapters.

The overall structure of the study takes the form of six chapters, including this introductory chapter.

Chapter Two begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research, and looks at how ....

The third chapter is concerned with the methodology used for this study.

The fourth section presents the findings of the research, focusing on the three key themes that ....

Chapter 6 analyses the results of interviews and focus group discussions undertaken during ....

The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows: ....

The final chapter draws upon the entire thesis, tying up the various theoretical and empirical strands in order to ....

.... and includes a discussion of the implication of the findings to future research into this area.

Finally, the conclusion gives a brief summary and critique of the findings .

Finally, areas for further research are identified.

### **Explaining Keywords (refer to *Defining Terms*)**

Throughout this paper, the term X will refer to ....

Throughout this dissertation, the term X will be used to refer to ....

In this article, the acronym/abbreviation XYZ will be used.

According to Smith (2002), X can be defined as follows: “....”

The term X is a relatively new name for ...., commonly referred to as ....

While a variety of definitions of the term X have been suggested, this paper will use the definition first suggested by Smith (1968) who saw it as ....

## Referring to Literature

One of the distinguishing features of academic writing is that it is informed by what is already known, what work has been done before, and/or what ideas and models have already been developed. Thus, academic writers frequently make reference to external sources. In some cases, where the individual author is important, the author's name will be the main subject of the sentence; in other cases, the source may only be mentioned in brackets ( .... ) or via a number notation system (e.g. footnotes and endnotes). The 'author as subject' style is less common in the empirical disciplines (sciences) and more commonly used in the humanities. The verbs and verb phrases typically used for referring to sources are listed below. Note that different referencing systems are used in different disciplines. In the examples given here, the Harvard in-text referencing system has been used.

The literature review: it is the purpose of the literature review section of a paper or dissertation to show the reader, in a systematic way, what is already known about the research topic as a whole, and to outline the key ideas and theories that help us to understand this. As well as being systematic, the review should be evaluative and critical of the studies or ideas which are relevant to the current work (refer to *Being Critical*). For example, you may think a particular study did not investigate some important aspect of the area you are researching, that the authors failed to notice a weakness in their methods, or that their conclusion is not well-supported.

A note on verb tenses: For general reference to the literature, the present perfect tense (have/has + verb + ed) tends to be used. For reference to specific studies carried out in the past, the simple past tense is most commonly used. This is always the case where a specific date or time in the past forms a part of the sentence. When referring to the words or ideas of writers, the present tense is often used if the ideas are still relevant, even if the author is no longer alive. The examples given below reflect these general patterns.

### General descriptions of the relevant literature

A large and growing body of literature has investigated ....  
More recent attention has focused on the provision of ....  
Much of the current literature on X pays particular attention to ....  
Over the past decade most research in X has emphasized the use of ....  
There is a large volume of published studies describing the role of ....  
In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on ....  
The generalisability of much published research on this issue is problematic.  
During the past 30 years, much more information has become available on ....  
A considerable amount of literature has been published on X. These studies ....  
The first serious discussions and analyses of X emerged during the 1970s with ....  
What we know about X is largely based upon empirical studies that investigate how ....

### General reference to previous research or scholarship: normally more than one author

Traditionally, it has been argued that .... (Smith, 1982; O'Brien, 1984).  
Surveys such as that conducted by Smith (1988) have shown that ....  
Many historians have argued that .... (e.g. Jones, 1987; Johnson, 1990; Smith, 1994).  
There is a consensus among social scientists that ....(e.g. Jones, 1987; Johnson, 1990; ....

Recent evidence suggests that .... (Smith, 1996; Jones 1999; Johnson, 2001)  
Recently, in vitro studies have shown that X can .... (Patel *et al.*, 1997; Jones *et al.*, 1998).

Several studies investigating X have been carried out on ....  
Several attempts have been made to .... (Smith, 1996; Jones 1999; ....).  
Several studies thus far have linked X with Y (Smith, 2002; Jones 2004; ....).  
Several studies have revealed that it is not just X that acts on .... (Smith, 1996; Jones ....)  
Several biographies of Brown have been published. Smith (2013) presents ....  
The geology of X has been addressed in several small-scale investigations and ....  
Data from several sources have identified the increased X and Y associated with obesity.

Previous studies have reported .... (Smith, 1985; Jones, 1987; Johnson, 1992).  
Previous research has indicated that various X indicators have a positive impact on ....  
Previous research findings into X have been inconsistent and contradictory (Smith, 1996; ....)

Numerous studies have attempted to explain .... (for example, Smith , 1996; Kelly, 1998; ....)  
A number of authors have reported analyses of trends in X that demonstrated ....  
A number of studies have found that .... (Smith , 2003; Jones, 2004).  
A number of studies have examined X (e.g. Smith, 2003; Jones, 2005), but to date none has ....

Xs have been identified as major contributing factors for the decline of many species (1).  
X has also been shown to reverse the anti-inflammatory effects of Y in murine-induced arthritis.

Twenty cohort study analyses have examined the relationship between ....  
At least 152 case-control studies worldwide have examined the relationship between.....  
Other studies have considered the relationship ....  
The relationship between X and Y has been widely investigated (Smith, 1985; Jones, 1987, ....  
The causes of X have been widely investigated (Jones, 1987; Johnson, 1990; Smith, 1994).  
Factors thought to be influencing X have been explored in several studies.

It has been suggested that levels of X are independent of the size of the Y (Smith *et al.*, 1995).  
It has conclusively been shown that X and Y increase Z (Smith *et al.*, 1999; Jones, 2001 ....).  
It has been demonstrated that a high intake of X results in damage to .... (Smith, 1998; ....).

#### **Reference to current state of knowledge**

There is an unambiguous relationship between X and Y (Rao, 1998).  
X is one of the most intense reactions following CHD (Lane, 2003).  
X has been found to oppose the anti-inflammatory actions of Y on Z (Alourfi, 2004).  
A relationship exists between an individual's working memory and their ability to .... (Jones, 2002).  
GM varieties of maize are able to cross-pollinate with non-GM varieties (Smith, 1998; Jones, 1999).

#### **Reference to single investigations in the past: researcher(s) as sentence subject**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Smith (1999)               | found that as levels of literacy and education of the population rise ....<br>showed that reducing X to 190°C decreased .... (see Figure 2) .<br>demonstrated that when the maximum temperature is exceeded ....                  |
| Jones <i>et al.</i> (2001) | investigated the differential impact of formal and non-formal education on ....<br>analysed the data from 72 countries and concluded that ....<br>reviewed the literature from the period and found little evidence for this .... |

interviewed 250 undergraduate students using semi-structured ....  
studied the effects of X on unprotected nerve cells.  
performed a similar series of experiments in the 1960s to show that ....  
carried out a number of investigations into the ....  
conducted a series of trials in which he mixed X with different quantities of ....  
measured both components of the ....  
labelled these subsets as ....  
examined the flow of international students ....  
identified parents of disabled children as ....  
used a survey to assess the various ....

Wang *et al.* (2004) have recently developed a methodology for the selective introduction of ....

#### **Reference to single investigations or publications in the past: time frame prominent**

In 1975, Smith *et al.* published a paper in which they described ....  
In 1990, Patel *et al.* demonstrated that replacement of H<sub>2</sub>O with heavy water led to ....  
Thirty years later, Smith (1974) reported three cases of X which ....  
In the 1950s, Gunnar Myrdal pointed to some of the ways in which .... (Myrdal, 1957)  
In 1981, Smith and co-workers demonstrated that X induced in vitro resistance to ....  
In 1990, Al-Masry *et al.* reported a new and convenient synthetic procedure to obtain ....  
In 1984, Jones *et al.* made several amino acid esters of X and evaluated them as ....

#### **Reference to single investigations in the past: investigation prominent**

Preliminary work on X was undertaken by Abdul Karim (1992).  
The first systematic study of X was reported by Patel *et al.* in 1986.  
The study of the structural behaviour of X was first carried out by Rao *et al.* (1986)....  
Analysis of the genes involved in X was first carried out by Smith *et al* (1983).  
One study by Smith (2014) examined the trend in ....  
A recent study by Smith and Jones (2012) involved ....  
A longitudinal study of X by Smith (2012) reports that ....  
A small scale study by Smith (2012) reaches different conclusions, finding no increase in ....  
  
Smith's cross-country analysis (2012) showed that ....  
Smith's comparative study (2012) found that ....  
Detailed examination of X by Smith and Patel (1961) showed that ....  
Brown's (1992) model of X assumes three main ....  
  
In an analysis of X, Smith *et al.* (2012) found ....  
In an investigation into X, Smith *et al.* (2012) found ....  
In another major study, Zhao (1974) found that just over half of the ....  
In a study which set out to determine X, Smith (2012) found that ....  
In a randomised controlled study of X, Smith (2012) reported that ....  
In a large longitudinal study, Smith *et al.* (2012) investigated the incidence of X in Y.  
In one well-known recent experiment, limits on X were found to be ..... (Al-Masry, 2013)

#### **Reference to single investigations in the past: research topic as main focus**

To determine the effects of X, Zhao et al (2005) compared ....  
X was originally isolated from Y in a soil sample from .... (Wang *et al.*, 1952).  
The electronic spectroscopy of X was first studied by Smith and Jones1 in 1970  
X formed the central focus of a study by Smith (2002) in which the author found ....  
X was first demonstrated experimentally by Pavlov (Smith, 2002). In his seminal study ....

The acid-catalyzed condensation reaction between X and Y was first reported by Smith in 1872  
To better understand the mechanisms of X and its effects, Al-Masry (2013) analysed the ....  
The way in which the X gene is regulated was studied extensively by Ho and colleagues (Ho *et al.* 1995 and 1998).

#### **Reference to what other writers do in their text: author as subject**

Smith (2013) identifies X, Y, and Z as the major causes of ....  
Perez (2013) draws on an extensive range of sources to assess ....  
Toh (2013) mentions the special situation of Singapore as an example of ....  
Al-Masry (2013) uses examples of these various techniques as evidence that ....  
Smith (2013) questions whether mainstream schools are the best environment for ....  
Jones (2013) draws our attention to distinctive categories of X often observed in ....  
Brown (2013) considers whether countries work well on cross-border issues such as ....  
Smith (2013) discusses the challenges and strategies for facilitating and promoting ....  
Jones (2013) provides in-depth analysis of the work of Aristotle showing its relevance to ....  
Rao (2013) lists three reasons why the English language has become so dominant. These are: ....  
Smith (2013) traces the development of Japanese history and philosophy during the 19th century.  
Smith (2013) defines evidence based medicine as the conscious, explicit and judicious use of ....  
Rao (2013) highlights the need to break the link between economic growth and transport growth ....

By drawing on the concept of X, Smith has been able to show that ....

Drawing on an extensive range of sources, the authors set out the different ways in which ....

In Chapter 2, Smith provides us with a number of important ....

In the subsequent chapter, Smith examines the extent to which ....

Some analysts (e.g. Carnoy, 2002) have attempted to draw fine distinctions between ....

Other authors (see Harbison, 2003; Kaplan, 2004) question the usefulness of such an approach.

In her major study,  
In her seminal article,  
In her classic critique of ....,  
In her case study of ....,  
In her review of ....,  
In her analysis of ....,  
In her introduction to ....,'

Smith (2012) identifies five characteristics of ....

#### **Reference to another writer's ideas or position (author as subject)**

According to Smith (2003), preventative medicine is far more cost effective, and therefore ....

As noted by Smith (2003) X is far more cost effective, and therefore ....

|              |  |      |   |
|--------------|--|------|---|
| Smith (2013) | points out<br>argues<br>maintains<br>claims<br>concludes<br>suggests | that | preventative medicine is far more cost effective, and therefore better adapted to the developing world. |
|--------------|--|------|---|

|              |            |   |
|--------------|------------|---|
| Smith (2013) | argues for | an explanatory theory for each type of irrational belief. |
|--------------|------------|---|

offers  
proposes  
suggests

### Synthesising sources

Similarly, Nicoladis (2006) found that X ....

In the same vein, Smith (1994) in his book XYZ notes ....

This view is supported by Jones (2000) who writes that ....

Smith argues that her data support O'Brien's (1988) view that ....

Al-Masry's (1986) work on X is complemented by Smith's (2009) study of ....

Almost every paper that has been written on X includes a section relating to ....

Unlike Smith, Jones (2013) argues that ....

In contrast to Smith, Jones (2013) argues that ....

A broader perspective has been adopted by Smith (213) who argues that ....

Conversely, Wang (2010) reported no significant difference in mortality between X and Y.

Smith argues that ....

Similarly, Jones (2013) asserts that ....

Al-Masry (2003) sees X as ....

Likewise, Wang (2012) holds the view that ....

Some writers (e.g. Smith, 2002) have attempted to draw fine distinctions between ....

Some authors have mainly been interested in questions concerning X and Y (Smith, 2001; Jones ....)

Much of the available literature on X deals with the question of ....

Others (see Jones, 2003; Brown, 2004) question the usefulness of ....

Others have highlighted the relevance of ....

But Smith (2008) is much more concerned with ....

Zhao (2002) notes that ....

However, Jennings' (2010) study of Y found no ....

Smith (2013) found that X accounted for 30% of Y.

Other researchers, however, who have looked at X, have found .... Jones (2010), for example, ....

Smith (2010) presents an X account,

whilst Jones (2011) ....

While Smith (2008) focusses on X,

Jones (2009) is more concerned with ....

### **Some ways of introducing quotations**

Commenting on X, Smith (2003) argues: '.... ....'

As Smith argues: 'In the past, the purpose of education was to ....' (Smith , 2000:150).

As Carnoy (2004: 215) states: 'there are many good reasons to be sceptical'.

In the final part of the Theses, Marx writes: 'Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point ....'

Sachs concludes: 'The idea of development stands today like a ruin in the intellectual landscape...' (Sachs, 1992a: 156).

|          |   |                   |
|----------|---|-------------------|
| As Smith | reminds us: '.... .... .... .... ....'<br>observes: '.... .... .... .... ....'<br>notes: '.... .... .... .... ....'<br>points out: '.... .... .... .... ....'<br>argues: '.... .... .... .... ....' | (Smith 2003: 23). |
|----------|---|-------------------|

### **Summarising the review or parts of the review**

Together, these studies outline that ....

Overall, these studies highlight the need for ....

Collectively, these studies outline a critical role for...

The evidence presented in this section suggests that ....

The studies presented thus far provide evidence that ....

Overall, there seems to be some evidence to indicate that ....

Together these studies provide important insights into the ....

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that ....

## **Describing Methods**

In the Methods section of a dissertation or research article, writers give an account of how they carried out their research. The Methods section should be clear and detailed enough for another experienced person to repeat the research and reproduce the results. Where the methods chosen are new, unfamiliar or perhaps even controversial, or where the intended audience is from many disciplines, the Methods section will tend to be much more extensive. Typical stretches of text found in this section of a research article or dissertation along with examples of the kind of language used for these are listed below. Note that for most of the functional categories in this section, the verbs are written in the simple past tense.

### **Describing previously used methods**

To date various methods have been developed and introduced to measure X:  
In most recent studies, X has been measured in four different ways.  
Traditionally, X has been assessed by measuring....  
Different authors have measured X in a variety of ways.  
Previous studies have based their criteria for selection on ....  
The use of qualitative case studies is a well-established approach in ....  
This test is widely available, and has been used in many investigational studies.  
Case studies have been long established in X to present detailed analysis of ....  
Recently, simpler and more rapid tests of X have been developed.  
Radiographic techniques are the main non-invasive method used to determine ....  
A variety of methods are used to assess X. Each has its advantages and drawbacks.  
Data were gathered from multiple sources at various time points during ....

### **Giving reasons why a particular method was adopted or rejected**

A case study approach was used to allow a ....  
Qualitative methods offer an effective way of ....  
A quantitative approach was employed since ....  
The design of the questionnaires was based on ....  
The X method is one of the more practical ways of ....  
The semi-structured approach was chosen because ....  
The X approach has a number of attractive features: ....  
The second advantage of using the multivariate method is ....  
For this study, the X was used to explore the subsurface ....  
Smith *et al.* (1994) identify several advantages of the case study, ....  
It was decided that the best method to adopt for this investigation was to ....  
The study uses qualitative analysis in order to gain insights into ....  
It was considered that quantitative measures would usefully supplement and extend the ....  
Many of the distributions were not normal so non-parametric signed rank tests were run.  
One advantage of the X analysis is that it avoids the problem of ....  
The sensitivity of the X technique has been demonstrated in a report by Smith *et al* (2011).  
However, there are certain drawbacks associated with the use of ....  
The main disadvantage of the experimental method is that ....  
A major problem with the experimental method is that ....  
There are certain problems with the use of focus groups. One of these is that there is less ....

### **Indicating a specific method**

X was prepared according to the procedure used by Patel *et al.* (1957).  
The synthesis of X was done according to the procedure of Smith (1973).  
X was synthesised using the same method that was detailed for Y, using ....

This compound was prepared by adapting the procedure used by Zhao *et al.* (1990).  
An alternative method for making scales homogenous is by using ....  
Samples were analysed for X as previously reported by Smith *et al.* (2012)

### **Describing the characteristics of the sample**

Eligibility criteria required individuals to have received ....  
A random sample of patients with .... was recruited from ....  
Forty-seven students studying X were recruited for this study.  
Just over half the sample (53%) was female, of whom 69% were ....  
Of the initial cohort of 123 students, 66 were female and 57 male.  
Only children aged between 10 and 15 years were included in the study.  
Eligible women who matched the selection criteria were identified by ....  
The students were divided into two groups based on their performance on ....  
All of the participants were aged between 18 and 19 at the beginning of the study....  
Two groups of subjects were interviewed, namely X and Y. The first group were ....  
The project used a convenience sample of 32 first year modern languages students.  
Participants were recruited from 15 clinics across ...., covering urban and rural areas ....  
The initial sample consisted of 200 students, 75 of whom belonged to minority groups.  
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 male offenders with a mean age of 38 years

Publications were only included in the analysis if ....  
Articles were searched from January 1965 until April 2010.  
A systematic literature review was conducted of studies that ....  
All studies described as using some sort of X procedure were included in the analysis.

### **Indicating reasons for sample characteristics**

Criteria for selecting the subjects were as follows:  
The area of study was chosen for its relatively small ....  
Five individuals were excluded from the study on the basis of ....  
A small sample was chosen because of the expected difficulty of obtaining ....  
The subjects were selected on the basis of a degree of homogeneity of their ....  
A comparison group of 12 male subjects without any history of X was drawn from a pool of ....

### **Describing the process: infinitive of purpose**

In order to identify the T10 and T11 spinous processes, the subjects were asked to ....  
In order to understand how X regulates Y, a series of transfections was performed.  
  
To establish whether ....,  
To measure X, a question asking .... was used.  
To see if the two methods gave the same measurement, the data was plotted and ....  
To control for bias, measurements were carried out by another person.  
To rule out the possibility that X, the participants were ....  
To determine whether ..., the cells were incubated for ....  
To enable the subjects to see the computer screen clearly, the laptop was configured with ....  
To increase the reliability of measures, each X was tested twice with a 4-minute break between ....  
To compare the scores three weeks after initial screening, a global ANOVA F-test was used  
  
The vials were capped with .... to prevent ....  
The process was repeated several times in order to remove ....  
In an attempt to make each interviewee feel as comfortable as possible, the interviewer ....

### **Describing the process: other phrases expressing purpose**

For the purpose of height measurement, subjects were asked to stand ....

For the purpose of analysis, 2 segments were extracted from each ....

For the estimation of protein concentration, 100 µL of protein sample was mixed with ....

### **Describing the process: typical verbs in the passive form**

The data *were normalised* using ....

Descriptive data *were generated* for all variables.

The procedures of this study *were approved* by ....

Data for this study *were retrospectively collected* from ....

Prompts *were used* as an aid to question two so that ....

The experiments *were run* using custom software written in....

Two sets of anonymised questionnaires *were completed* by ....

The solution *was washed* three times with deionized water and ....

A total of 256 samples *were taken* from 52 boreholes (Figure 11).

Significance levels *were set* at the 1% level using the student t-test.

Data management and analysis *were performed* using SPSS 16.0 (2010).

Published studies *were identified* using a search strategy developed in ....

The experiments *were carried out* over the course of the growing period from ....

Injection solutions *were coded* by a colleague to reduce experimenter bias.

Drugs *were administered* by icv injection under brief CO<sub>2</sub> narcosis;

The subjects *were asked* to pay close attention to the characters whenever ....

The pilot interviews *were conducted* informally by the trained interviewer ....

Blood samples *were obtained* with consent, from 256 Caucasian male patients ....

Independent tests *were carried out* on the x and y scores for the four years from ....

This experiment *was repeated* under conditions in which the poor signal/noise ratio was improved.

Article references *were searched* further for additional relevant publications.

The mean score for the two trials *was subjected* to multivariate analysis of variance to determine ....

### **Describing the process: sequence words and phrases**

Prior to commencing the study, ethical clearance was sought from ....

Prior to undertaking the investigation, ethical clearance was obtained from ....

In the end, the EGO was selected as the measurement tool for the current study.

After 'training', the subjects *were told* that ....

After collection, the samples *were shipped* back to X in ....

After conformational analysis of X, it *was necessary* to ....

After the appliance *was fitted*, the patients attended X every four weeks.

After obtaining written informed consent from the patients, a questionnaire regarding the ....

Once the Xs *were located* and marked, a thin clear plastic ruler ....

Once the positions had been decided upon, the Xs *were removed* from each Y and replaced by ....

Once the exposures *were completed*, the X *was removed* from the Y and placed in .....

On completion of X, the process of model specification and parameter estimation *was carried out*.

On arrival at the clinic, patients *were asked* to ....

Following this, the samples *were recovered* and stored overnight at ....

Following correction for ...., X *was reduced* to ....

These ratings *were then made* for the ten stimuli to which the subject had been exposed ....

The analysis *was checked* when initially performed and *then checked* again at the end of ....

The subjects *were then shown* a film individually and were asked to ....

The soil was *then* weighed again, and this weight was recorded as ....  
The results were corrected for the background readings and *then* averaged before  
Finally, questions were asked as to the role of ....  
In the follow-up phase of the study, participants were asked ....

#### **Describing the process: adverbs of manner**

The soil was then placed in a furnace and *gradually* heated up to ....  
The vials were shaken *manually* to allow the soil to mix well with the water.  
The medium was then *aseptically* transferred to a conical flask.  
The resulting solution was *gently* mixed at room temperature for ten minutes and ....  
A sample of the concentrate was then *carefully* injected into ....  
The tubes were *accurately* reweighed to six decimal places using ....

#### **Describing the process: using + instrument**

15 subjects were recruited using email advertisements requesting healthy students from ....  
All the work on the computer was carried out using Quattro Pro for Windows and ....  
Data were collected using two high spectral resolution Xs.  
The data was recorded on a digital audio recorder and transcribed using a ....  
Semi-automated genotyping was carried out using X software and ....  
Statistical significance was analysed using analysis of variance and t-tests as appropriate.  
Comparisons between the two groups were made using unrelated t-tests.  
Using the X-ray and looking at the actual X, it was possible to identify ....  
Using an Anthos Micro plate Reader, we were able to separate single cells into different ....

#### **Describing the process: giving detailed information**

Compounds 3 and 5 were dissolved in X at apparent pH 2.5 to give concentrations of 4mM ....  
.... and the solutions were degraded at 55°C or 37°C for a total time of 42 hours.  
At intervals of 0.5 min, 50 µL of the X was aliquoted into 0.5mL of Y (pH 7.5) to ....

#### **Indicating problems or limitations**

In this investigation there are several sources for error. The main error is ....  
Another major source of uncertainty is in the method used to calculate X.  
In particular, the analysis of X was problematic.  
Further data collection is required to determine exactly how X affects Y.  
It was not possible to investigate the significant relationships of X and Y further because the sample size was too small.

## Reporting Results

The standard approach to this section of a research article or dissertation is to present and describe the results in a systematic and detailed way. When reporting qualitative results, the researcher will highlight and comment on the themes that emerge from the analysis. These comments will often be illustrated with excerpts from the raw data. In text based studies, this may comprise quotations from the primary sources. In quantitative studies, the results section is likely to consist of tables and figures, and writers comment on the significant data shown in these. This often takes the form of the location or summary statement, which identifies the table or figure and indicates its content, and a highlighting statement or statements, which point out and describe the relevant or significant data. All figures and tables should be numbered and given a title.

More elaborate commentary on the results is normally restricted to the Discussion section. In research articles, however, authors may comment extensively on their results as they are presented, and it is not uncommon for the Results section to be combined with the Discussion section under the heading: Results and Discussion.

### Reference to aim or method

Changes in X and Y were compared using ....

Simple statistical analysis was used to ....

To assess X, the Y questionnaire was used.

To distinguish between these two possibilities, ....

T-tests were used to analyse the relationship between ....

In order to assess Z, repeated-measures ANOVAs were used.

Regression analysis was used to predict the ....

The average scores of X and Y were compared in order to ....

Nine items on the questionnaire measured the extent to which ....

The correlation between X and Y was tested.

The first set of analyses examined the impact of ....

To compare the scores three weeks after initial screening, a global ANOVA F-test was used.

A scatter diagram and a Pearson's product moment correlation were used to determine the relationship between ....

Table 1  
Figure 1

shows  
compares  
presents  
provides

an overview of ....  
the experimental data on X.  
the summary statistics for ....  
the breakdown of X according to ....  
the results obtained from the preliminary analysis of X.  
the intercorrelations among the nine measures of X.

The table below illustrates  
The pie chart above shows

some of the main characteristics of the ....  
the breakdown of ....

As shown in Figure 1,  
As can be seen from the table (above),  
It can be seen from the data in Table 1 that  
From the graph above we can see that

the X group reported significantly more Y than the other two groups.

The results obtained from the preliminary analysis of X  
The results of the correlational analysis  
The themes identified in these responses

are shown  
can be compared  
are presented  
are set out  
are summarised

in Table 1.  
in Figure 1.

### **Highlighting significant data in a table or chart**

It is apparent from this table that very few ....  
This table is quite revealing in several ways. First, unlike the other tables .....  
What is interesting in this data is that ....  
In Fig.10 there is a clear trend of decreasing ....  
As Table III shows, there is a significant difference ( $t = -2.15, p = 0.03$ ) between the two groups.  
The differences between X and Y are highlighted in Table 4  
From the chart, it can be seen that by far the greatest demand is for ....  
From the data in Figure 9, it is apparent that the length of time left between ....  
From this data, we can see that Study 2 resulted in the lowest value of ....  
Data from this table can be compared with the data in Table 4.6 which shows ....

### **Statements of positive result**

Strong evidence of X was found when ....  
This result is significant at the  $p = 0.05$  level.  
There was a significant positive correlation between ....  
There was a significant difference between the two conditions ....  
On average, Xs were shown to have ....  
The mean score for X was ....  
Interestingly, for those subjects with X, ....  
A positive correlation was found between X and Y.  
The results, as shown in Table 1, indicate that ....  
A two-way ANOVA revealed that ....  
Post hoc analysis revealed that during ....  
Further analysis showed that ....  
Further statistical tests revealed ....

### **Statements of negative result**

There was no increase of X associated with .....  
There were no significant differences between ....  
No significant differences were found between ....  
No increase in X was detected.  
No difference greater than X was observed.  
No significant reduction in X was found compared with placebo.  
None of these differences were statistically significant.  
Overall, X did not affect males and females differently in these measures.

The Chi-square test did not show any significant differences between ....  
A clear benefit of X in the prevention of Y could not be identified in this analysis.  
Only trace amounts of X were detected in ....

#### **Highlighting significant, interesting or surprising results**

Interestingly, the X was observed to ....  
Interestingly, this correlation is related to ....  
The more surprising correlation is with the ....  
The most surprising aspect of the data is in the ....  
The most striking result to emerge from the data is that ....  
The correlation between X and Y is interesting because ....  
Interestingly, there were also differences in the ratios of ....  
The single most striking observation to emerge from the data comparison was ....

#### **Reporting a reaction**

When X cells were stimulated with Y, no significant difference in the number of Z was detected.  
However, stimulation of X cells with Y did not increase the ....  
Following the addition of X, a significant increase ( $P<0.05$ ) in the Y was recorded.  
With successive increases in intensity of the X, the Y moved further to ....

#### **Reporting results from questionnaires and interviews**

The response rate was 60% at six months and 56% at 12 months.  
Of the study population, 90 subjects completed and returned the questionnaire.  
Thirty-two individuals returned the questionnaires.  
By the end of the survey period, data had been collected from 64 individuals, 23 of whom were ....

This section of the questionnaire required respondents to give information on ....  
Respondents were asked to indicate whether ....  
Respondents were asked to suggest other reasons for ....  
There were 53 responses to the question: '....?'  
The total number of responses for this question was ....  
The overall response to this question was poor.

In response to the question: '....?', a range of responses was elicited.  
In response to Question 1, most of those surveyed indicated that ....  
The overall response to this question was very positive.  
When the participants were asked ....., the majority commented that ....  
Other responses to this question included ....

The majority of those who responded to this item felt that ....  
70% of those who were interviewed indicated that ....  
Almost two-thirds of the participants (64%) said that ....  
Just over half of those who answered this question reported that ....  
Over half of those surveyed reported that ....  
Approximately half of those surveyed did not comment on .....  
Of the 62 participants who responded to this question, 30 reported an increase in ....  
Of the 148 patients who completed the questionnaire, just over half indicated that ....

A small number of those interviewed suggested that .....  
Only a small number of respondents indicated that ....  
Some participants expressed the belief that .....  
One individual stated that '....' And another commented '....'  
A minority of participants (17%) indicated that ....

One participant commented: ‘ ....’

Another interviewee alluded to the notion of ....

### **Observations about qualitative data**

The themes of X and Y recurred throughout the dataset.

Five broad themes emerged from the analysis.

Two discrete reasons emerged from this. First .... Second ....

A number of issues were identified ....

This theme came up for example in discussions of ....

A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst interviewees that ...

These views surfaced mainly in what respects ....

There was a sense of X amongst interviewees ....

A variety of perspectives were expressed ....

A common view amongst interviewees was that ....

Issues related to X were not particularly prominent in the interview data.

In their accounts of the events surrounding ....

As one interviewee said: ....

As one interviewee put it: ....

For example, one interviewee said: ....

Talking about this issue an interviewee said: ....

Another interviewee, when asked ..., said: ....

The extract/comment below shows ....

Some interviewees argued that .... while others ....

Some felt that .... while others considered that ....

Two divergent and often conflicting discourses emerged ....

Whilst a minority mentioned that... all agreed that...

### **Transition statements**

If we now turn to ....

A comparison of the two results reveals ....

Turning now to the experimental evidence on ....

Comparing the two results, it can be seen that ....

The next section of the survey was concerned with ....

In the final part of the survey, respondents were asked ....

### **Summary and transition**

These results suggest that ....

Overall, these results indicate that ....

Together these results provide important insights into ....

Taken together, these results suggest that there is an association between ....

In summary, these results show that ....

The results in this Chapter indicate that .... The next Chapter, therefore, moves on to discuss the ....

## Discussing Findings

The term 'discussion' has a variety of meanings in English. In academic writing, however, it usually refers to two types of activity: a) considering both sides of an issue, or question before reaching a conclusion; b) considering the results of research and the implications of these. Discussion sections in dissertations and research articles are probably the most complex sections in terms of their elements. They normally centre around a 'statement of result' or an important 'finding'. As there is usually more than one result, discussion sections are often structured into a series of discussion cycles. The most common elements in these cycles, and some of the language that is typically associated with them, are listed below.

Note that when offering explanations and suggesting implications the language used is very tentative or cautious (refer to the section entitled *Expressing Caution*).

### **Background information: reference to literature or to research aim/question**

As mentioned in the literature review, ....

The third question in this research was ....

Prior studies that have noted the importance of ....

An initial objective of the project was to identify ....

Very little was found in the literature on the question of ....

This study set out with the aim of assessing the importance of X in ....

The first question in this study sought to determine ....

It was hypothesized that participants with a history of ....

The present study was designed to determine the effect of ....

A strong relationship between X and Y has been reported in the literature.

In reviewing the literature, no data was found on the association between X and Y.

### **Statements of result: usually with reference to results section**

The current study found that ....

The most interesting finding was that ....

In this study, Xs were found to cause ....

The results of this study show/indicate that ....

This experiment did not detect any evidence for ....

On the question of X, this study found that ....

The most important clinically relevant finding was ....

Another important finding was that ....

In the current study, comparing X with Y showed that the mean degree of ....

X provided the largest set of significant clusters of ....

It is interesting to note that in all seven cases of this study ....

The results of this study did not show that .../did not show any significant increase in ....

### **Unexpected outcome**

Surprisingly, X was found to ....

What is surprising is that ....

One unanticipated finding was that ....

Surprisingly, no differences were found in ....

This finding was unexpected and suggests that ....

It is somewhat surprising that no X was noted in this condition ....

Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a significant difference between ....

However, the observed difference between X and Y in this study was not significant.

However, the ANOVA (one way) showed that these results were not statistically significant.

### **Reference to previous research: support**

These findings further support the idea of ....

This finding confirms the association between ....

This study confirms that X is associated with ....

These results match those observed in earlier studies.

The results of this study will now be compared to the findings of previous work.

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Smith and Jones (2001) who ....

These results are consistent with those of other studies and suggest that ....

This finding supports previous research into this brain area which links X and Y.

This finding corroborates the ideas of Smith and Jones (2008), who suggested that ....

This finding is in agreement with Smith's (1999) findings which showed ....

It is encouraging to compare this figure with that found by Jones (1993) who found that ....

Increased activation in the X in this study corroborates these earlier findings.

The present findings seem to be consistent with other research which found ....

This also accords with our earlier observations, which showed that ....

These results agree with the findings of other studies, in which ....

In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that ....

The findings observed in this study mirror those of the previous studies that have examined the effect of ....

This study produced results which corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in this field.

There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by X in this study and those described by (Smith, 1987, 1995) and Jones (1986).

### **Reference to previous research: contradict**

However, the findings of the current study do not support the previous research.

This study has been unable to demonstrate that ....

However, this result has not previously been described.

In contrast to earlier findings, however, no evidence of X was detected.

These results differ from X's 2003 estimate of Y, but they are broadly consistent with earlier ....

Although, these results differ from some published studies (Smith, 1992; Jones, 1996), they are consistent with those of ....

### **Explanations for results**

There are several possible explanations for this result.

A possible explanation for these results may be the lack of adequate ....

It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to ....

There are, however, other possible explanations.

These factors may explain the relatively good correlation between X and Y.

These differences can be explained in part by the proximity of X and Y.

Some authors have speculated that ....

A possible explanation for this might be that ....

Another possible explanation for this is that ....

This result may be explained by the fact that ....

It seems possible that these results are due to ....

This inconsistency may be due to ....

This discrepancy could be attributed to ....

This rather contradictory result may be due to ....

The observed increase in X could be attributed to ....  
Since this difference has not been found elsewhere it is probably not due to ....

The observed correlation between X and Y might be explained in this way. ....  
The reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with ....  
It may be that these students benefitted from ....  
There are two likely causes for the differences between ....  
The possible interference of X cannot be ruled out.

#### **Advising cautious interpretation**

These findings cannot be extrapolated to all patients.  
These data must be interpreted with caution because ....  
These results therefore need to be interpreted with caution.  
It is important to bear in mind the possible bias in these responses.  
However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to ....  
Although exclusion of X did not reduce the effect on X, these results should be interpreted with caution.

#### **Suggesting general hypotheses**

The value of X suggests that a weak link may exist between ....  
It is therefore likely that such connections exist between ....  
It can thus be suggested that ....  
It is possible to hypothesise that these conditions are less likely to occur in ....  
It is possible/likely/probable therefore that ....  
Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that ....  
These findings suggest that ....  
It may be the case therefore that these variations ....  
In general, therefore, it seems that ....  
It is possible, therefore, that ....  
Therefore, X could be a major factor, if not the only one, causing ....  
It can therefore be assumed that the ....  
This finding, while preliminary, suggests that ....

#### **Noting implications**

This finding has important implications for developing ....  
An implication of this is the possibility that ....  
One of the issues that emerges from these findings is ....  
Some of the issues emerging from this finding relate specifically to ....  
This combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual premise that ....  
These findings may help us to understand ....  
These results provide further support for the hypothesis that ....

#### **Commenting on findings**

However, these results were not very encouraging.  
These findings are rather disappointing.  
The test was successful as it was able to identify students who ....  
The present results are significant in at least major two respects.  
These findings will doubtless be much scrutinized, but there are some immediately dependable conclusions for ....  
The results of this study do not explain the occurrence of these adverse events.

### **Suggestions for future work**

Further work is required to establish this.

This is an important issue for future research.

Several questions remain unanswered at present.

There is abundant room for further progress in determining ...

Further research should be done to investigate the ....

Research questions that could be asked include ....

Future studies on the current topic are therefore recommended.

A further study with more focus on X is therefore suggested.

Further studies, which take these variables into account, will need to be undertaken.

In future investigations, it might be possible to use a different X in which ....

In further research, the use of this data as X could be a means of ....

However, more research on this topic needs to be undertaken before the association between X and Y is more clearly understood.

## **Writing Conclusions**

Conclusions are shorter sections of academic texts which usually serve two functions. The first is to summarise and bring together the main areas covered in the writing, which might be called 'looking back'; and the second is to give a final comment or judgement on this. The final comment may also include making suggestions for improvement and speculating on future directions.

In dissertations and research papers, conclusions tend to be more complex and will also include sections on significance of the findings and recommendations for future work. Conclusions may be optional in research articles where consolidation of the study and general implications are covered in the Discussion section. However, they are usually expected in dissertations and essays.

### **Restatement of aims**

This paper has argued that ....

This study set out to determine ....

This essay has discussed the reasons for ....

The present study was designed to determine the effect of ....

The main goal of the current study was to determine ....

In this investigation, the aim was to assess ....

The purpose of the current study was to determine ....

This project was undertaken to design .... and evaluate ....

Returning to the hypothesis/question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that ....

### **Summarising research findings**

This study has shown that ....

The investigation of X has shown that ....

These findings suggest that in general ....

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that ....

It was also shown that ....

This study has found that generally ....

The relevance of X is clearly supported by the current findings.

This study/research has shown that ....

The second major finding was that ....

The results of this investigation show that ....

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that ....

X, Y and Z emerged as reliable predictors of ....

Multiple regression analysis revealed that the ....

### **Suggesting implications**

The evidence from this study suggests that ....

The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study ....

The results of this study indicate that ....

The results of this research support the idea that ....

In general, therefore, it seems that ....

Taken together, these results suggest that ....

An implication of this is the possibility that ....

The findings of this study suggest that ....

### **Significance of the findings or research contribution**

This research extends our knowledge of ....  
The present study makes several noteworthy contributions to ....  
This work contributes to existing knowledge X by providing ....  
The present study provides additional evidence with respect to ....  
The current findings add to a growing body of literature on ....  
The study has confirmed the findings of Smith *et al.* (2001) which found that ....  
The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. First,...  
These findings enhance our understanding of ....  
The study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of ....  
The X that we have identified therefore assists in our understanding of the role of ....  
The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of ....  
The key strengths of this study are its long duration and ....

This is the first study reporting an advantage in those who ....  
This is the first time that X has been used to explore ....  
This is the largest study so far documenting a delayed onset of ....  
This study has demonstrated, for the first time, that ....  
The analysis of X undertaken here, has extended our knowledge of ....  
This research will serve as a base for future studies and ....  
The methods used for this X may be applied to other Xs elsewhere in the world.  
Taken together, these findings suggest a role for X in promoting Y.  
The present study confirms previous findings and contributes additional evidence that suggests ....  
This research has several practical applications. Firstly, it points to ....

### **Significance of the findings with a qualification**

Whilst this study did not confirm X, it did partially substantiate ....  
Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insight into ....  
Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants, the findings suggest ....  
Notwithstanding these limitations, the study suggests that ....

### **Limitations of the current study**

Finally, a number of important limitations need to be considered. First, ....  
The findings in this report are subject to at least three limitations. First, ....  
Thirdly, the study did not evaluate the use of ....  
The generalisability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, ....  
The most important limitation lies in the fact that ....  
The major limitation of this study is the low response rate.  
A limitation of this study is that the numbers of patients and controls were relatively small.  
Several limitations to this pilot study need to be acknowledged. The sample size is ....  
This limitation means that study findings need to be interpreted cautiously.  
  
The current study has only examined ....  
The current investigation was limited by ....  
The current study was unable to analyse these variables.  
The current research was not specifically designed to evaluate factors related to ....  
  
The study is limited by the lack of information on ....  
The scope of this study was limited in terms of ....  
However, these findings are limited by the use of a cross sectional design.  
The project was limited in several ways. First, the project used a convenience sample that ....  
The sample was nationally representative of X but would tend to miss people who were ....

However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to ....

These results may not be applicable to ....

It is unfortunate that the study did not include ....

The main weakness of this study was the paucity of ....

An arguable weakness is the arbitrariness in our definition of ....

An issue that was not addressed in this study was whether....

A number of caveats need to be noted regarding the present study.

One source of weakness in this study which could have affected the measurements of X was ....

Although the study has successfully demonstrated that ...., it has certain limitations in terms of ....

### **Recommendations for further research work**

This research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation.

What is now needed is a cross-national study involving ....

More broadly, research is also needed to determine ....

More research is needed to better understand when implementation ends and ....

More research is required to determine the efficacy of ....

It would be interesting to assess the effects of ....

It would be interesting to compare experiences of individuals within the same ... .

It is recommended that further research be undertaken in the following areas:

It is suggested that the association of these factors is investigated in future studies.

Further work needs to be done to establish whether ....

Further research is needed to account for the varying ....

Further research might explore/investigate ....

Further research in this field would be of great help in ....

Further research regarding the role of X would be worthwhile/interesting.

Further investigation and experimentation into X is strongly recommended.

Further experimental investigations are needed to estimate ....

A further study could assess the long-term effects of ....

Further research needs to examine more closely the links between X and Y.

Future trials should assess the impact of ....

Future research should therefore concentrate on the investigation of ....

A future study investigating X would be very interesting.

A number of possible future studies using the same experimental set up are apparent.

Another possible area of future research would be to investigate why ....

A natural progression of this work is to analyse ....

These findings provide the following insights for future research: ....

The precise mechanism of X in insects remains to be elucidated.

Considerably more work will need to be done to determine .....

The issue of X is an intriguing one which could be usefully explored in further research.

Large randomised controlled trials could provide more definitive evidence.

A greater focus on X could produce interesting findings that account more for ....

More information on X would help us to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter.

If the debate is to be moved forward, a better understanding of X needs to be developed.

I suggest that before X is introduced, a study similar to this one should be carried out on ....

**Implications or recommendations for practice or policy**

Other types of X could include: a), b). ....

There is, therefore, a definite need for ....

Moreover, more X should be made available to ....

Another important practical implication is that ....

Unless governments adopt X, Y will not be attained.

These findings suggest several courses of action for ....

A reasonable approach to tackle this issue could be to ....

There are a number of important changes which need to be made.

Management to enhance bumble-bee populations might involve ....

A key policy priority should therefore be to plan for the long-term care of ....

This information can be used to develop targetted interventions aimed at ....

Taken together, these findings do not support strong recommendations to ....

An implication of these findings is that both X and Y should be taken into account when ....

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice.

## **General functions of academic writing**

## Being Critical

As an academic writer, you are expected to be critical of the sources that you use. This essentially means questioning what you read and not necessarily agreeing with it just because the information has been published. Being critical can also mean looking for reasons why we should not just accept something as being correct or true. This can require you to identify problems with a writer's arguments or methods, or perhaps to refer to other people's criticisms of these. Constructive criticism goes beyond this by suggesting ways in which a piece of research or writing could be improved.

*..... being against is not enough. We also need to develop habits of constructive thinking.*

Edward de Bono

### Introducing questions, problems and limitations: theory

A major criticism of Smith's work is that ....

One question that needs to be asked, however, is whether ....

A serious weakness with this argument, however, is that ....

One of the limitations with this explanation is that it does not explain why.... .

One criticism of much of the literature on X is that ....

The key problem with this explanation is that ....

The existing accounts fail to resolve the contradiction between X and Y.

However, there is an inconsistency with this argument.

Smith's argument relies too heavily on qualitative analysis of ....

It seems that Jones' understanding of the X framework is questionable.

Smith's interpretation overlooks much of the historical research ....

Many writers have challenged Jones' claim on the grounds that ....

X's analysis does not take account of .... nor does he examine ....

### Introducing questions, problems and limitations: method/practice

One major drawback of this approach is that ....

The main limitation of biosynthetic incorporation, however, is ....

However, this method of analysis has a number of limitations.

However, approaches of this kind carry with them various well known limitations.

Another problem with this approach is that it fails to take X into account.

Perhaps the most serious disadvantage of this method is that ....

Difficulties arise, however, when an attempt is made to implement the policy.

All the studies reviewed so far, however, suffer from the fact that ....

However, there are limits to how far the idea of/concept of X can be taken.

However, such explanations tend to overlook the fact that ....

However, one of the problems with the instrument the researchers used to measure X was ....

Nevertheless, the strategy has not escaped criticism from governments, agencies and academics.

Smith's study of X is considered to be the most important, but it does suffer from the fact that ....

Although this is the most comprehensive account of X produced so far, it does suffer from a number of flaws.

However, all the previously mentioned methods suffer from some serious

limitations  
weaknesses  
disadvantages  
drawbacks.

### Identifying a study's weakness

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| (However, | <p>the main weakness of the study is the failure to address how ....<br/>         the study fails to consider the differing categories of damage that ....<br/>         the research does not take into account pre-existing .... such as ....<br/>         the author offers no explanation for the distinction between X and Y.<br/>         Smith makes no attempt to differentiate between different types of X.<br/>         Jones fails to fully acknowledge the significance of ....<br/>         the paper would appear to be over ambitious in its claims.<br/>         the author overlooks the fact that X contributes to Y.<br/>         what Smith fails to do is to draw a distinction between ....<br/>         another weakness is that we are given no explanation of how ....<br/>         Smith fails to fully define what ....<br/>         no attempt was made to quantify the association between X and Y.</p> |
|-----------|--|

### Offering constructive suggestions

|   |                                    |                                     |   |                                    |  |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|
| Smith's paper<br>Her conclusions<br>The study<br>The findings | would have been<br>might have been | more<br>much<br>more<br>far<br>more | useful<br>convincing<br>interesting<br>persuasive<br>original | if he/she had<br>if the author had | included<br>considered<br>adopted<br>used .... |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|

A more comprehensive study would include all the groups of ....

A better study would examine a large, randomly selected sample of societies with ....

A much more systematic approach would identify how X interacts with other variables that are believed to be linked to ....

### Using evaluative adjectives to comment on research

|                               |  |  |   |  |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| In his<br>In their<br>In this | <p>excellent<br/>comprehensive<br/>detailed<br/>useful<br/>thorough<br/>ground breaking<br/>timely<br/>important<br/>impressive</p> <hr/> <p>limited<br/>small-scale</p> | <p>analysis (of X),<br/>examination (of X),<br/>study (of X),<br/>survey (of X),<br/>investigation (into Y),</p> | <p>Smith (2012)<br/>Jones <i>et al.</i></p> | <p>found ....<br/>were able to show ....<br/>concluded that ....</p> |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|--|

### **Highlighting inadequacies of previous studies**

Researchers have not treated X in much detail.  
Previous studies of X have not dealt with ....  
Such expositions are unsatisfactory because they ....  
Most studies in the field of X have only focussed on ....  
Half of the studies evaluated failed to specify whether ....  
The research to date has tended to focus on X rather than Y.  
However, these studies used non-validated methods to measure ....  
Most studies in X have only been carried out in a small number of areas.  
The existing accounts fail to resolve the contradiction between X and Y.  
However, much of the research up to now has been descriptive in nature ....  
Small sample sizes have been a serious limitation for many earlier studies.  
The generalisability of much published research on this issue is problematic.  
However, few writers have been able to draw on any structured research into ....  
However, only a small number of participants took part and it was not made clear ....  
However, these results were limited to X and are therefore not representative of ....  
The experimental data are rather controversial, and there is no general agreement about ....  
Although extensive research has been carried out on X, no single study exists which adequately ....  
However, these results were based upon data from over 30 years ago and it is unclear if these differences still persist.

### **Introducing general criticism**

Non-government agencies are also very critical of the new policies.  
The X theory has been vigorously challenged in recent years by a number of writers.  
These claims have been strongly contested in recent years by a number of writers.  
Smith's meta-analysis has been subjected to considerable criticism.  
The most important of these criticisms is that Smith failed to note that ....  
Critics question the ability of poststructuralist theory to provide ....  
More recent arguments against X have been summarised by Smith and Jones (1982):  
Critics have also argued that not only do surveys provide an inaccurate measure of X, but the ....  
Many analysts now argue that the strategy of X has not been successful. Jones (2003), for example, argues that ....

### **Introducing the critical stance of particular writers**

Jones (2003) has also questioned why ....  
However, Jones (2003) points out that ....  
The authors challenge the widely held view that ....  
Jones (2003) is critical of the conclusions that Smith draws from his findings.  
Jones (2003) has challenged some of Smith's conclusions, arguing that ....  
Jones (2003) is probably the best known critic of the X theory. He argues that ....  
The latter point has been devastatingly critiqued by Jones (2003), who argues that ....  
Other authors (see Harbison, 2003; Kaplan, 2004) question the usefulness of such an approach.  
Smith's analysis has been criticised by a number of writers. Jones (1993), for example, points out that ....

## **Being Cautious**

One of the most noticeable stylistic aspects of academic communication is the tendency for writers to avoid expressing absolute certainty, where there may be a small degree of uncertainty, and to avoid making over-generalisations, where a small number of exceptions might exist. This means that there are many instances where the epistemological strength (strength of knowledge) of a statement or claim is mitigated (weakened) in some way. In the field of linguistics, devices for lessening the strength of a statement or claim are known as hedging devices.

Analysis of research reports have shown that discussion sections tend to be particularly rich in hedging devices, particularly where writers are offering explanations for findings.

### **Devices that distance the author from a proposition**

It is believed that ....

It is thought that ....

It is a widely held view that ....

It has commonly been assumed that ....

It has been reported that ....

Smith (2001) holds the view that ....

If Smith's (2001) findings are accurate, ....

According to recent reports, ....

According to Smith (2002), ....

Many scholars hold the view that ....

Recent research has suggested that ....

There is some evidence to suggest that ....

### **Being cautious when giving explanations or hypothesising**

These frequent storms

are almost certainly  
could be  
may be  
might be

due to climate change.

It is almost certain that  
It is likely that  
It may be that  
It could be that  
It is possible that

the more extreme weather

is a result of climate change.

A likely explanation  
A probable explanation  
A possible explanation

is that

these frequent storms

are a result of climate change.

### **Being cautious when explaining results**

This inconsistency may be due to ....  
This discrepancy could be attributed to ....  
A possible explanation for this might be that ....  
It seems possible that these results are due to ....  
This rather contradictory result may be due to ....  
The observed increase in X could be attributed to ....  
The possible interference of X cannot be ruled out ....  
There are several possible explanations for this result.  
There are two likely causes for the differences between ....  
A possible explanation for these results may be the lack of adequate ....  
Since this difference has not been found elsewhere it is probably not due to ....

### **Being cautious when discussing implications or recommendations**

One possible implication of this is that ....  
The findings of this study suggest that ....  
The evidence from this study suggests that ....  
Taken together, these results suggest that ....  
The data reported here appear to support the assumption that ....  
Initial observations suggest that there may be a link between ....  
The findings from these studies suggest that X can have an effect on ....  
Strategies to enhance X might involve ....  
These results would seem to suggest that the ....  
There would therefore seem to be a definite need for ....  
A reasonable approach to tackle this issue could be to ....  
Other types of response could include: a), b). ....  
Another possible area of future research would be to investigate why ....

### **Devices for avoiding over-generalisation**

|                   |   |                                   |
|-------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Ozone is toxic to | almost all<br>most<br>many types of<br>the majority of<br>certain types of<br>some types of | living organisms.                 |
| Ozone levels      | nearly always<br>frequently<br>often<br>occasionally  | exceed WHO levels in many cities. |

Ozone tends to attack cells and break down tissues.  
There is a tendency for ozone to attack cells.

### **Being cautious when writing about the future**

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Severe weather  | will almost certainly<br>will probably<br>is likely to<br>could<br>may<br>might | become more common in the future.            |
| It is almost certain that<br>There is a strong possibility that<br>It is likely that<br>There is a possibility that<br>There is a small chance that |   | the situation will improve in the long term. |

### **Advising cautious interpretation of findings (Refer to *Discussing Findings*)**

These data must be interpreted with caution because ....

These results therefore need to be interpreted with caution.

However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be ....

These findings cannot be extrapolated to all patients.

Although exclusion of X did not ...., these results should be interpreted with caution.

It is important to bear in mind the possible bias in these responses.

## Classifying and Listing

When we classify things, we group and name them on the basis of something that they have in common. By doing this we can understand certain qualities and features which they share as a class. Classifying is also a way of understanding differences between things. In writing, classifying is often used as a way of introducing a reader to a new topic. Along with writing definitions, the function of classification may be used in the early part of an essay, or longer piece of writing. We list things when we want to treat and present a series of items or different pieces of information systematically. The order of a list may indicate rank importance.

### General classifications

|                       |            |  |
|-----------------------|------------|--|
| X may be divided into | three main | classes.<br>sub-groups.<br>categories. |
|-----------------------|------------|--|

|                     |  |   |                  |
|---------------------|--|---|------------------|
| X may be classified | on the basis of<br>according to<br>depending on<br>in terms of | Y | into Xi and Xii. |
|---------------------|--|---|------------------|

It has become commonplace to distinguish 'passive' from 'active' forms of X. There are two main types of memory: declarative and non-declarative memory. Associative learning can be categorised into classical and operant conditioning. Bone is generally classified into two types: X bone, also known as ...., and Y bone or .... Systems theory distinguishes two different types of X, i.e. social and semantic Xs (Al-Masry 2013).

Aristotle's systematic treatises may be grouped in several divisions: logic, psychological works, physical .... The works of Aristotle fall under three headings: (1) dialogues and ....; (2) collections of facts and ....; and (3) systematic works. There are two basic approaches currently being adopted in research into X. One is the Y approach and the other is .... Generally, spectra typing provides two types of information: band intensity pattern and band number.

### Specific classifications

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| In the US system, X is graded | according to whether ....<br>on the basis of ....<br>in terms of .... |
|-------------------------------|---|

|              |                                  |    |                                       |
|--------------|----------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------|
| Smith (1966) | divided<br>classified<br>grouped | Xs | into two broad types: Xi's and Xii's. |
|--------------|----------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------|

|                         |                               |  |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Thomas (1996) describes | four basic kinds of validity: | logical, content, criterion and construct. |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--|

Individuals were classified as belonging to upper or lower categories of ....  
 Smith and Jones (2003) argue that there are two broad categories of Y, which are: a) .... and b) ....  
 For Aristotle, motion is of four kinds: (1) motion which ....; (2) motion which ....; (3) motion which ....; and (4) motion which....  
 To better understand the mechanisms of X and its therapeutic implications, Smith *et al.*(2011) classified X into 3 distinct types using ....

### **Introducing lists**

This topic can best be treated under three headings: X, Y and Z.  
 The key aspects of management can be listed as follows: X, Y and Z.  
 There are three reasons why the English language has become so dominant. These are:  
 There are two types of effect which result when a patient undergoes X. These are ....  
 The disadvantages of the new approach can be discussed under three headings, which are: ....  
 The *Three Voices for Mass* is divided into six sections. These are: the *Kyrie, Gloria*, ....  
 Appetitive stimuli have three separable basic functions. Firstly, they .... Secondly, they ....  
 During his tour of Britain, he visited the following industrial centres: Manchester, Leeds, and ....  
 This section has been included for several reasons: it is ....; it illustrates ....; and it describes....  
 The *Mass for Four Voices* consists of five movements, which are: the *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Santus* and *Agnus Dei*.

### **Referring to other people's lists**

Smith and Jones (1991) list X, Y and Z as the major causes of infant mortality.  
 Smith (2003) lists the main features of X as follows: it is X; it is Y; and it has Z.  
 Smith (2003) argues that there are two broad categories of Y, which are: a) .... and b) ....  
 Smith (2003) suggests three conditions for its acceptance. Firstly, X should be .... Secondly, it needs to be.... Thirdly, ....  
 For Aristotle, motion is of four kinds: (1) motion which ....; (2) motion which ....; (3) motion which ....; and (4) motion which....

## Comparing and Contrasting

By understanding similarities and differences between two things, we can increase our understanding and learn more about both. This usually involves a process of analysis, in which we compare the specific parts as well as the whole. Comparison may also be a preliminary stage of evaluation. For example, by comparing specific aspects of A and B, we can decide which is more useful or valuable. Many paragraphs whose function is to compare or contrast will begin with an introductory sentence expressed in general terms.

### Introductory Sentences: Differences

X is different from Y in a number of respects.

X differs from Y in a number of important ways.

There are a number of important differences between X and Y.

Women and men differ not only in physical attributes but also in the way in which they ....

|              |                   |  |                              |
|--------------|-------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Smith (2003) | found<br>observed | distinct<br>significant<br>notable<br>considerable<br>major<br>only slight | differences between X and Y. |
|--------------|-------------------|--|------------------------------|

Jones (2013) found dramatic differences in the rate of decline of X between Y and Z.

Areas where significant differences have been found include X and Y.

The nervous systems of X are significantly different from those of Y in several key features.

### Introductory Sentences: Similarities

|  |  |                         |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| The mode of processing used by the right brain | is similar to that<br>is comparable to that<br>is comparable in complexity to that | used by the left brain. |
|--|--|-------------------------|

There are a number of similarities between X and Y.

The effects of X on human health are similar to those of Y.

Both X and Y generally take place in a 'safe environment'.

Numerous studies have compared Xs in humans and animals and found that they are essentially identical.

### Comparison within one sentence

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Oral societies tend to be more concerned with the present | whereas<br>while   | literate societies have a very definite awareness of the past. |
| Whereas<br>While  | oral societies tend to be more concerned with the present, | literate societies have a very definite awareness of the past. |

In contrast to oral communities, it is very difficult to get away from calendar time in literate societies.

Compared with people in oral cultures, people in literate cultures organise their lives around clocks and calendars.

|                     |  |   |
|---------------------|--|---|
| This interpretation | contrasts with that<br>differs from that<br>is different from that | of Smith and Jones (2004) who argue that .... |
|---------------------|--|---|

#### **Comparison within one sentence (comparative forms)**

Women are faster/slower than men at certain precision manual tasks, such as .....

Women tend to perform better/worse than men on tests of perceptual speed.

Further, men are more/less accurate in tests of target-directed motor skills.

Women are more/less likely than men to suffer aphasia when the front part of the brain is damaged.

Adolescents are less likely to be put to sleep by alcohol than adults.

Women tend to have greater/less verbal fluency than men.

In the trial, women made fewer errors than men.

The corpus callosum, a part of the brain connecting the two hemispheres, may be more/less extensive in women.

#### **Indicating difference across two sentences**

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| It is very difficult to get away from calendar time in literate societies. | By contrast,<br>In contrast,<br>On the other hand, | many people in oral communities have little idea of the calendar year of their birth. |
|--|--|---|

#### **Indicating similarity across two sentences**

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Young children learning their first language need simplified input. | Similarly,<br>Likewise,<br>In the same way, | low level adult L2 learners need graded input supplied in most cases by a teacher. |
|---|---|--|

## Defining Terms

In academic work students are often expected to give definitions of key words and phrases in order to demonstrate to their tutors that they understand these terms clearly. Academic writers generally, however, define terms so that their readers understand exactly what is meant when certain key terms are used. When important words are not clearly understood misinterpretation may result. In fact, many disagreements (academic, legal, diplomatic, personal) arise as a result of different interpretations of the same term. In academic writing, teachers and their students often have to explore these differing interpretations before moving on to study a topic.

### Introductory phrases:

It is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by ....

This shows a need to be explicit about exactly what is meant by the word X.

X is a term frequently used in the literature, but to date there is no consensus about ....

There is a degree of uncertainty around the terminology in ....

### Simple three-part definitions

|                                    |                         |  |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| A university is                    | an institution          | where knowledge is produced and passed on to others  |
| Social Economics may be defined as | the branch of economics | [which is] concerned with the measurement causes and consequences of social problems.  |
| Research may be defined as         | a systematic process    | which consists of three elements or components: (1) a question, problem, or hypothesis, (2) data, and (3) analysis and interpretation of data. |
| Braille is                         | a system                | of touch reading and writing for blind people in which raised dots on paper represent the letters of the alphabet.                             |

### General meanings or application of meanings

The term X refers to ....

The term X encompasses A), B), and C).

X can be defined as .... It encompasses ....

X can be loosely described as a correlation.

The term X has come to be used to refer to ....

The term X is generally understood to mean ....

The term X has been applied to situations where students ....

In the literature, the term tends to be used to refer to ....

The broad use of the term X is sometimes equated with ....

Whereas X refers to the operations of ...., Y refers to the ....

The term disease refers to a biological event characterised by ....

The term X is a relatively new name for a Y, commonly referred to....

In broad biological terms, X can be defined as any stimulus that is ....

Defined as XYZ, obesity is now considered a worldwide epidemic and is associated with ....

### **Indicating difficulties in defining a term**

A generally accepted definition of X is lacking.

Unfortunately, X remains a poorly defined term.

The term X embodies a multitude of concepts which ....

A further definition is given by Smith (1982) who describes ....

In the field of language teaching, various definitions of X are found.

Smith (2001) identified four abilities that might be subsumed under the term X: a) ....

Although differences of opinion still exist, there appears to be some agreement that X refers to ....

X is a commonly-used notion in language learning and yet it is a concept difficult to define precisely.

### **Specifying terms that are used in an essay or thesis**

In the present report, X was therefore defined in terms of ....

In this essay, the term X will be used in its broadest sense to refer to all ....

In this paper, the term that will be used to describe this phenomenon is X.

In this dissertation, the terms X and Y are used interchangeably to mean ....

Throughout this thesis, the term education is used to refer to informal systems as well as .....

While a variety of definitions of the term X have been suggested, this paper will use the definition first suggested by Smith (1968) who saw it as ....

### **Referring to people's definitions: author prominent**

For Smith (2001), fluency means/refers to ....

Smith (2001) uses the term 'fluency' to refer to ....

Smith (1954) was apparently the first to use the term ....

The term 'fluency' is used by Smith (2001) to refer to ....

Macro-stabilisation policy is defined by Smith (2003: 119) as '.... ....'

This definition is close to those of Smith (2012) and Jones (2013) who define X as ...

In 1987, sports psychologist John Smith popularized the term 'X' to describe ....

According to a definition provided by Smith (2001:23), fluency is 'the maximally ....

Aristotle defines the imagination as 'the movement which results upon an actual sensation.'

One of the first people to define nursing was Florence Nightingale (1860), who wrote: '.... ....'

Chomsky writes that a grammar is a 'device of some sort for producing the ....' (1957, p.11).

Smith, has shown that, as late as 1920, Jones was using the term 'X' to refer to particular ....

The term 'matter' is used by Aristotle in four overlapping senses. First, it is the underlying ....

Secondly, it is the potential which ....

Smith *et al.* (2002) have provided a new definition of health: 'health is a state of being with physical, cultural, psychological ....'

### **Referring to people's definitions: author non-prominent**

Validity is the degree to which an assessment process or device measures what it is intended to measure (Smith *et al.*, 1986)

## **Describing Trends and Projections**

A trend is the general direction in which something is developing or changing over time. A projection is a prediction of future change. Trends and projections are usually illustrated using line graphs in which the horizontal axis represents time. Some of the language commonly used for writing about trends and projections is given below.

### **Describing trends**

|                                       |   |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| The graph shows that there has been a | slight<br>gradual<br>slow<br>steady<br>marked<br>steep<br>sharp | increase<br>rise<br>decrease<br>fall<br>decline<br>drop | in the number of divorces in England and Wales since 1981. |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|

### **Describing high and low points in figures**

The number of live births outside marriage reached a peak during the second world war.  
The peak age for committing a crime is 18.  
Oil production peaked in 1985.  
Gas production reached a (new) low in 1990.

### **Projecting trends**

|  |  |   |             |
|--|--|---|-------------|
| The number of Xs<br>The amount of Y<br>The rate of Z | is projected to<br>is expected to<br>is likely to<br>will probably | decline steadily<br>drop sharply<br>level off | after 2020. |
|--|--|---|-------------|

## **Describing Quantities**

The language for writing about quantities can be a complex area for non-native speakers because there are many combinations of short grammar words, such as prepositions and pronouns, and these can easily be confused. Many of the phrases given below also contain approximators such as: *nearly, approximately, over half, less than, just over*.

### **Describing ratios and proportions**

*The proportion of live births outside marriage reached one in ten in 1945.*

*The proportion of the population attending emergency departments was 65% higher in X than ....*

*Singapore has the highest proportion of millionaire households.*

*East Anglia had the lowest proportion of lone parents at only 14 per cent.*

*The annual birth rate dropped from 44.4 to 38.6 per 1000 per annum.*

### **Describing fractions**

*Over half of those surveyed indicated that ....*

*Of the 148 patients who completed the questionnaire, just over half indicated that ....*

*Approximately half of those surveyed did not comment on ....*

*Nearly half of the respondents (48%) agreed that ....*

*Less than a third of those who responded (32%) indicated that ....*

*The number of first marriages in the United Kingdom fell by nearly two-fifths.*

### **Describing percentages**

*The response rate was 60% at six months and 56% at 12 months.*

*Returned surveys from 34 radiologists yielded a 34% response rate.*

*70% of those who were interviewed indicated that ....*

*Since 1981, England has experienced an 89% increase in crime.*

*The mean income of the bottom 20 percent of U.S. families declined from \$10,716 in 1970 to ....*

*X found that of 2,500 abortions, 58% were in young women aged 15-24, of whom 62% were ....*

*He also noted that less than 10% of the articles included in his study cited ....*

*In 1960 just over 5% of live births in 1960 were outside marriage.*

### **Describing averages**

*This figure can be seen as the average life expectancy at various ages.*

*The proposed model suggests a steep decline in mean life expectancy ....*

*Roman slaves probably had a lower than average life expectancy.*

*The average of 12 observations in the X, Y and Z is 19.2 mgs/m ....*

*The mean score for the two trials was subjected to multivariate analysis of variance to determine ....*

*The mean income of the bottom 20 percent of U.S. families declined from \$10,716 in 1970 to ....*

### **Describing ranges**

*Estimates of X range from 200,000 to 700,000 and up to a million or more.*

*The respondents had practised for an average of 15 years (range 6 to 35 years).*

*The participants were aged 19 to 25 and were from both rural and urban backgrounds.*

*They calculated ranges of journal use from 10.7%–36.4% for the humanities, 25%–57% for ....*

*Rates of decline ranged from 2.71– 0.08 cm day (Table 11) with a mean of 0.97 cm per day.*

*The evidence shows that life expectancy from birth lies in the range of twenty to thirty years.*

*Between 575 and 590 metres depth the sea floor is extremely flat, with an average slope of ....*

*The mean income of the bottom 20 percent of U.S. families declined from \$10,716 to \$9,833.*

## Explaining Causality

A great deal of academic work involves understanding and suggesting solutions to problems. At postgraduate level, particularly in applied fields, students search out problems to study. In fact, one could say that problems are the raw material for a significant proportion of academic activity. However, solutions cannot be suggested unless the problem is fully analysed, and this involves a thorough understanding of the causes. Some of the language that you may find useful for explaining causes and effects is listed below.

### Verbs indicating causality

|                              |  |                                  |
|------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Lack of protein              | may cause<br>can lead to<br>can result in    | mental disability.               |
| Scurvy is a disease          | caused by<br>resulting from<br>stemming from | lack of vitamin C.               |
| Much of the instability in X | stems from                                   | the economic effects of the war. |
| Low levels of chlorine       | can give rise to                             | high blood pressure.             |

### Nouns indicating causality

The most likely causes of X are poor diet and lack of exercise.  
The *causes* of X have been the subject of intense debate within ....  
A *consequence* of vitamin A deficiency is blindness.  
X can have profound health *consequences* for older people.  
Physical activity is an important *factor* in maintaining fitness.  
Many other medications have an *influence* on cholesterol levels.  
Another *reason* why Xs have declined is that ....

### Prepositional phrases indicating causality

|                                     |   |                   |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| 200,000 people per year become deaf | owing to<br>because of<br>as a result of<br>as a consequence of | a lack of iodine. |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------|

### **Sentence connectors indicating causality**

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| If undernourished children do survive to become adults, they have decreased learning ability. | Therefore,<br>Consequently,<br>Because of this,<br>As a result (of this), | when they grow up, it will probably be difficult for them to find work. |
|---|---|---|

### **Adverbial phrases indicating causality**

|   |                 |  |
|---|-----------------|--|
| Malnutrition leads to illness and a reduced ability to work in adulthood, | thus<br>thereby | perpetuating the poverty cycle.<br><br>creating an area of low pressure. |
|---|-----------------|--|

### **Other examples**

X and Y are important driving factors of Z.

As a consequence of X , it appears that Y alone is not the causative factor of....

Extreme loneliness is a risk factor for X.

X is almost as strong a risk factor for disability as Y.

X is generally seen as a factor strongly related to Y.

Due to X and Y, inflowing surface water becomes more dense as it ....

The mixing of X and Y exerts a powerful effect upon Z through .....

The study found that loneliness has twice the impact on early death as obesity does.

Loneliness can have profound health consequences for older people.

### **Possible cause and effect relationships expressed tentatively**

This suggests a weak link may exist between X and Y.

The human papilloma virus is linked to most cervical cancer.

The use of X may be linked to behaviour problems in ....

There is some evidence that X may affect Y.

The findings indicate that regular exercise could improve cognitive function in people at risk of ....

It is not yet clear whether X is made worse by Y.

X may have been an important factor in ....

X may have contributed to the increase in ....

X may have played a vital role in bringing about ....

X may have been caused by an increase in ....

In the literature, X has been associated with Y.

X in many cases may be associated with certain bacterial infections.

A high consumption of X could be associated with infertility.

## Giving Examples as Support

Writers may give specific examples as evidence to support their general claims or arguments. Examples can also be used to help the reader or listener understand unfamiliar or difficult concepts, and they tend to be easier to remember. For this reason, they are often used in teaching. Finally, students may be required to give examples in their work to demonstrate that they have understood a complex problem or concept. It is important to note that when statements are supported with examples, the explicit language signalling this may not always be used.

### Examples as the main information in a sentence

|         |   |                       |
|---------|---|-----------------------|
| A<br>An | well-known<br>notable<br>classic<br>useful<br>important | example of X is ..... |
|---------|---|-----------------------|

For example, the word 'doctor' used to mean a 'learned man'.

For example, Smith and Jones (2004) conducted a series of semi-structured interviews in ....

Young people begin smoking for a variety of reasons. They may, for example, be influenced by ....

An example of this is the study carried out by Smith (2004) in which ....

This is exemplified in the work undertaken by ....

Another example of what is meant by X is ....

The effectiveness of the X technique has been exemplified in a report by Smith et al (2010)

This distinction is further exemplified in studies using ....

This is certainly true in the case of ....

In a similar case in America, Smith (1992) identified ....

This can be seen in the case of the two London physics laboratories which ....

This is evident in the case of ....

The evidence of X can be clearly seen in the case of ....

X is a good illustration of ....

This can be illustrated briefly by ....

X illustrates this point this point clearly.

By way of illustration, Smith (2003) shows how the data for ....

These experiments illustrate that X and Y have distinct functions in ....

### Examples as additional information in a sentence

Young people begin smoking for a variety of reasons, *such as* pressure from peers and the role model of parents.

Pavlov found that if some other stimulus, *for example* the ringing of a bell, preceded the food, the dog would start salivating.

In Paris, Gassendi kept in close contact with many other prominent scholars, *such as* Kepler, Galileo, Hobbes, and Descartes.

The prices of resources, *such as* copper, iron ore, oil, coal and aluminium, have declined in real terms over the past 20 years.

Many diseases can result at least in part from stress, *including*: arthritis, asthma, migraine, headaches and ulcers.

**Reporting cases as support**

Overall, these cases support the view that ....

This case has shown that ....

This has been seen in the case of ....

The case reported here illustrates the ....

This case study confirms the importance of ....

The evidence presented thus far supports the idea that ....

This case demonstrates how X used innovative marketing strategies in ....

As this case very clearly demonstrates, it is important that ....

This case reveals the need for further investigation in patients with ....

This case demonstrates the need for better strategies for ....

In support of X, Y has been shown to induce Y in several cases (Smith *et al.*, 2001).

Recent cases reported by Smith *et al.* (2013) also support the hypothesis that ....

## **Signalling Transition**

Previewing what is to follow in a paper or dissertation is like showing a map to a driver; it enables them to see where they are going. So it is useful to think of a preview section as a 'road map' for the reader. It must be accurate, but it must be easy to follow.

Writers are also expected to indicate to the reader when they are moving from one topic to another, or from one section of text to another. These are known as transition statements and examples of these, together with some previewing statements, are given below.

### **Previewing sections of text**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on X. It begins by ....

This introductory section provides a brief overview of .... It then goes on to ....

This part of the thesis discusses the findings which emerged from the statistical analysis presented in the previous chapter.

This chapter describes and discusses the methods used in this investigation. The first section .... The second part moves on to describe in greater detail the ....

The final chapter of this dissertation is divided into two parts. The first ....

This chapter is divided into four main sections, each of which presents the results relating to one of the research questions.

The structure and biological functions of Xs will be discussed in the forthcoming sections.

### **Introducing a new topic or aspect of a topic**

As regards X, ....

With respect to X, ....

With regard to X, ....

Regarding X, ....

As far as X is concerned, ....

In terms of X, ....

In the case of X ....

### **Reintroducing a topic**

As was pointed out in the introduction to this paper, ....

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, ....

As explained earlier, ....

As explained in the introduction, it is clear that ....

As described on the previous page, ....

As discussed above, ....

Returning (briefly) to the (subject/issue) of X, ....

### **Moving from one section to the next**

So far this paper/chapter has focussed on X. The following section will discuss ....

Before proceeding to examine X, it will be necessary to ....

Before employing these theories to examine X, it is necessary to ....

Having defined what is meant by X, I will now move on to discuss ....

Having discussed how to construct X, the final section of this paper addresses ways of ....

This section has analysed the causes of X and has argued that .... The next part of this paper will ....

This chapter has demonstrated that .... It is now necessary to explain the course of ....

Turning now to the experimental evidence on ....

This (chapter) follows on from the previous (chapter), which (examined/laid out/outlined) X.

#### **Moving from one section to the next whilst indicating addition, contrast or opposition**

In addition, it is important to ask ....

On the other hand, in spite of much new knowledge about the role of ....,

However, this system also has a number of serious drawbacks.

Despite this, little progress has been made in the ....

#### **Previewing a following section**

This raises questions about X which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The next chapter describes synthesis and evaluation of ....

In the section that follows, it will be argued that ....

The following is a brief report on a ....

What follows is a description/outline/account of ...

The problem of X is discussed in the following section.

#### **Transition statements for results and discussion**

Turning now to the experimental evidence on ....

Comparing the two results, it can be seen that ....

A comparison of the two results reveals ....

As pointed out in the introduction to this paper, ....

From the previous discussion, it can be seen that .....

It is also worth noting that X is significantly more frequent in ....

The differences between X and Y are highlighted in Table 4.

#### **Summary and preview**

This section has reviewed the three key aspects of ....

This chapter has described the methods used in this investigation and it has ....

In this section, it has been explained that ....The chapter that follows moves on to consider the....

This chapter began by describing X and arguing that .... It went on to suggest that the .... The next chapter describes the procedures and methods used in this investigation

These analytical procedures and the results obtained from them are described in the next chapter

A summary of the main findings and of the principal issues and suggestions which have arisen in this discussion are provided in the next chapter, which ...

In the next section, I will present some of the findings of my empirical research on the impact of ....

## Writing about the Past

Writing about the past in English is made difficult by the rather complex tense system. However, the phrases grouped below give an indication of the uses of the main tenses in academic writing. For a comprehensive explanation of the uses of the various tenses you will need to consult a good English grammar book. A good recommendation is *Practical English Usage* by Michael Swan, Oxford University Press.

### Time phrases associated with the use of the simple past tense: specific times or periods of time in the past, completed

During the Nazi period,  
Between 1933 and 1945,  
From 1933 to 1945,  
In the 1930s and 1940s,

restrictions were placed on German academics.

For centuries,  
In the second half of the 19th century,  
At the end of the nineteenth century,

church authorities placed restrictions on academics.

Following World War I,

Fleming actively searched for anti-bacterial agents.

In 1999,

Fleming was named one of the *100 Most Important People* of the century.

### Time phrases associated with the use of the present perfect tense: past and present connected

To date, little evidence has been found associating X with Y.

Up to now, the research has tended to focus on X rather than on Y.

Since 1965, these four economies have doubled their share of world production and trade.

So far, three factors have been identified as being potentially important: X, Y, and Z.

Until recently, there has been little interest in X.

Recently, these questions have been addressed by researchers in many fields.

In recent years, researchers have investigated a variety of approaches to X but ....

More recently, literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings about ....

The past decade has seen the rapid development of X in many ....

Over the past few decades, the world has seen the stunning transformation of X, Y and Z.

Over the past century there has been a dramatic increase in ....

**The present perfect tense may also be used to describe research or scholarly activity that has taken place recently**

Several studies have revealed that ....

Previous studies of X have not dealt with ....

A considerable amount of literature has been published on X.

There have been several investigations into the causes of illiteracy (Smith, 1985; Jones, 1987).

The new material has been shown to enhance cooling properties (Smith, 1985, Jones, 1987).

Invasive plants have been identified as major contributing factors for the decline of ....

The relationship between a diet high in fats and poor health has been widely investigated (Smith, 1985, Jones, ....

**For reference to single investigations or publications in the past the simple past tense is used**

In 1975, Smith *et al.* published a paper in which they described ....

In 1990, Patel *et al.* demonstrated that replacement of H<sub>2</sub>O with heavy water led to ....

In the 1950s, Gunnar Myrdal pointed to some of the ways in which .... (Myrdal, 1957)

In 1981, Smith and co-workers demonstrated that X induced in vitro resistance to ....

In 1984, Jones *et al.* made several amino acid esters of X and evaluated them as ....

An experimental demonstration of this effect was first carried out by ....

The first experimental realisation of ...., by Smith *et al.* [12], used a ....

The first systematic study of X was reported by Patel *et al.* in 1986.

Erythromycin was originally isolated from X in a soil sample from .... (Wang *et al.*, 1952).

Smith and Jones (1994) were the first to describe X, and reported that ....

Thirty years later, Smith (1974) reported three cases of Candida Albicans which ....

# Notes on academic writing

## A note on academic style

The principal characteristics of written academic style are listed below.

### 1. Evidence-based

Perhaps the most important distinguishing feature of written academic style is that it is evidence-based. Writers support their arguments and claims with evidence from the body of knowledge relevant to their discipline. In addition, any research that is undertaken, must make reference to previous work in the field. As a result, academic texts are rich in attributions to other writers and references to previous research, as seen in the examples below:

- *Previous studies have shown that ....*
- *These sources suggest that from the fifth century onwards ....*
- *According to the 1957 Annual Medical report, the death of the 960 inhabitants of ....*
- *However, as has been shown elsewhere (e.g. Smith, 1992), the increase in ....*

For further examples, refer to the section on **Referring to the Literature** in this document.

In addition, general propositions are usually supported with real examples.

- *This can be seen in the case of ....*
- *A good example of this can be found in ....*

### 2. Words of classical origin

Unlike everyday English, academic writing is characterised by a high frequency of words of classical origin (Greek and Latin). The main reason for this is that Latin was the *lingua academica* during the European renaissance; in other words, it was the international language of scholars. Even up until relatively recently, great works of science, such as Isaac Newton's *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), were written in Latin. Even where academic texts were written in English, words of classical origin were used for concepts and phenomena for which there was no equivalent in English.

Although the *lingua academica* of today is English, writers of academic English still tend to use words which are derived from Latin, and also, mainly through Latin, from Greek.

| everyday words | academic words |
|----------------|----------------|
| worry          | concern        |
| story          | account        |
| get rid of     | eradicate      |
| a lot of       | considerable   |
| not enough     | insufficient   |
| trouble        | difficulty     |
| big            | significant    |
| way (of doing) | method         |
| bring together | synthesise     |
| thing          | object         |

There are also some changes to grammatical words (though these are not of classical origin):

| <b>everyday words</b>                                       | <b>academic words</b>                         |
|---|---|
| not much research<br>not many studies<br>isn't any evidence | little research<br>few studies<br>no evidence |

→

### 3. Cautious

Academic writers are careful about the claims they make: they take care not to appear certain where some doubt may exist, and they are careful not to over-generalise. An example of this kind of transformation can be seen below. The second sentence is in academic style:

- *Drinking alcohol causes breast cancer in women.* →
- *Some studies suggest that drinking alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer.*

For more examples of this kind of language, refer to the section on ***Being Cautious***.

### 4. Impersonal

In the interests of objectivity, academic writers tend to remove themselves from the writing. The focus is on 'what' happened, 'how' it was done and 'what' was found. The 'who' (the writer) is not normally given very much attention. This is one of the reasons why personal pronouns ('I' and 'we') tend not to be used. In addition, academic texts rarely address the reader directly and the pronoun normally used for this, 'you', is avoided.

- *You could say that Churchill made some catastrophic decisions early in the War* →
- *It can be said that Churchill made some catastrophic decisions early in the War*

There are some exceptions: in certain disciplines, it may be appropriate for a writer to explain their personal interest in the research area. In some disciplines, the researcher may participate in the research as a participant-observer. In these cases, 'I' will be used. The example below, which illustrates the former situation, is taken from a dissertation in History.

*I became interested in X after reading ..... I hope to convey some of my fascination for the subject, as well as expressing my admiration of the artistic achievements of those involved*

In research undertaken by teams, for example in medicine and science, it is common for the research to be reported using the personal pronoun 'we'.

### 5. Nominalisation

There is a tendency for academic writers to transform verbs (actions) into nouns. In the example below, the verb 'abandoned' becomes the abstract noun 'abandonment'.

- *Unwanted Roman children were generally abandoned in a public place.* →
- *The abandonment of unwanted Roman children generally occurred in a public place.*

As a result of this kind of transformation, academic writing is characterised by long noun phrase constructions, as in: 'the abandonment of unwanted Roman children'. In certain cases, these nominalised forms can become long and complex:

- *the effect of reducing aggressiveness by producing an ACTH-mediated condition of decreased androgen levels*

Although this kind of construction is considered normal in scientific writing, unless the reader is familiar with the constructions, it does make reading difficult as there are so many pieces of information to process in the one sentence. There is an argument that too much nominalisation should be discouraged.

## **6. Rhetorical questions**

Questions to introduce significant new ideas are avoided, and are replaced with statements:

- *Is the welfare system good or not? →*
- *It is important to consider the effectiveness of the British welfare system.*

## **7. Contracted forms avoided**

Contracted forms (e.g. *it's*, *don't*, *isn't*, *aren't*) should not be used in academic writing. The only exception would be if you're transcribing a recorded conversation or interview.

## **8. Precise and detailed**

Last of all, one of the most noticeable features of academic writing is that it is very precise and detailed. This relates to the setting out and development of the thinking and the ideas as well as to the language used in the writing.

## A note on commonly confused words

Your spell checker will only indicate words that are misspelt and which it does not recognise. However, if a misspelling results in a word which has another meaning or use, the spellchecker will not show this to you. Here is a list of words which are commonly confused:

### **Abbreviation/acronym**

An *abbreviation* is a shortened form of a word or phrase. Usually, but not always, it consists of a letter or group of letters taken from the word or phrase. *Dr.* and *Prof.* are common examples. An *acronym* is an abbreviation formed from the initial components in a phrase or a word. These elements in turn form a new word: *NATO*, *Benelux*, *UNESCO*.

### **affect/effect**

*Affect* is a verb, e.g. *A affects B*;

*Effect* is a noun and is therefore always used after an article/determiner ('an' or 'the'/'this'), e.g. *The Greenhouse Effect*.

### **compliment/complement**

*Compliment* (verb) means to praise someone. *Complement* (verb) means to complete something in a way that makes it very good. Both words can also be used as nouns.

### **comprise/consist**

Both words mean 'to be made up of', but only *consist* is accompanied by *of*.

### **discrete/discreet**

*Discrete* is an adjective which means 'separate' or 'distinct'. *Discreet* is an adjective which means 'to keep silent or tactful about something'.

### **formerly/formally**

*Formerly* means 'earlier'. *Formally* means 'conventionally' or 'officially'.

### **i.e./e.g.**

*i.e.* is the abbreviation for *id est* which mean 'that is' or 'in other words'.

*e.g.* is the abbreviation for *exempli gratia* which has the same meaning as 'for example' and 'for instance'.

### **its/it's**

*its* – without an apostrophe - is a possessive determiner similar to 'my' or 'your' .

*it's* is a contracted form of 'it is' or 'it has' . Note, however, that contracted forms are avoided in academic writing.

### **later/latter**

*Later* is an adverb which means 'at an advanced point of time'. *Latter* is an adjective used to refer to items listed in a text. It means 'most recently mentioned'; in other words, the last item.

### **practice/practise**

In British English, *practice* is a noun and *practise* is a verb. American English allows both spellings for both forms.

### **precede/proceed**

*Precede* means 'to come before'. *Proceed* means 'to go forward' or 'to begin to carry out'.

**principle/principal**

*Principle* is a noun which means ‘a basic belief, theory or rule’. *Principal* is an adjective which means ‘main’ or ‘most important’.

**there/their**

*There* is used to indicate the existence of something. *Their* is used to indicate possession, i.e. if something belongs to someone or something.

**prescribe/proscribe**

*Prescribe* means to advise or authorise the use of something. *Proscribe* means to forbid or to restrict.

## A note on British and US spelling

The most common difference which is noticed in academic writing concerns verbs which end in *ise/yse* Br. or *ize/zyze* US:

- *analyse* Br. v *analyze* US.
- *industrialise* Br. v *industrialize* US.

This difference also affects the nouns derived from the verbs:

- *organisation* Br. v *organization* US.
- *globalisation* Br. v *globalization* US.

Another noticeable difference relates to words ending in *re*:

- *centre* Br. v *center* US.
- *metre* Br. v *meter* US.

Here are some other differences:

| British              |  | US                  |
|----------------------|--|---------------------|
| <i>aeroplane</i>     |  | <i>airplane</i>     |
| <i>analogue</i>      |  | <i>analog</i>       |
| <i>behaviour</i>     |  | <i>behavior</i>     |
| <i>catalogue</i>     |  | <i>catalog</i>      |
| <i>colour</i>        |  | <i>color</i>        |
| <i>connection</i>    |  | <i>connexion</i>    |
| <i>defence</i>       |  | <i>defense</i>      |
| <i>endeavour</i>     |  | <i>endeavour</i>    |
| <i>encyclopaedia</i> |  | <i>encyclopedia</i> |
| <i>fibre</i>         |  | <i>fiber</i>        |
| <i>foetus</i>        |  | <i>fetus</i>        |
| <i>instalment</i>    |  | <i>installment</i>  |
| <i>labour</i>        |  | <i>labor</i>        |
| <i>paediatric</i>    |  | <i>pediatric</i>    |
| <i>plough</i>        |  | <i>plow</i>         |
| <i>programme</i>     |  | <i>program</i>      |
| <i>rigour</i>        |  | <i>rigor</i>        |
| <i>sceptical</i>     |  | <i>skeptical</i>    |
| <i>skilful</i>       |  | <i>skillful</i>     |
| <i>travelled</i>     |  | <i>traveled</i>     |

If you are writing for a British university or a British journal, you should use the British spelling.

## A note on punctuation

As the purpose of punctuation is to make written English easier to read and to make the meaning clear and unambiguous, good, accurate punctuation is important in academic writing. The following notes highlight points of particular relevance to academic writing.

### 1. Full stop .

- To indicate the end of a sentence
- To indicate an abbreviation such as *etc.*, *et al.* (not always used)
- To indicate an omission in a quoted text [ ... ]

### 2. Comma ,

- To separate two main parts of a sentence joined by words such as *and*, *or*, *but*,
- To separate a dependent part of a sentence (beginning with words such as *although*, *when*, *because*) from the main part, particularly if the dependent part comes first in the sentence
- To indicate additional information, *however relevant it may be*, in a sentence (parenthesis)
- To indicate a non-defining relative clause, *which simply provides additional information*, in a sentence
- To separate items in a list such as *clauses, phrases, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs*

### 3. Colon :

- To introduce an explanation: *The reason the experiment failed was obvious: the equipment was faulty.*
- To introduce a list, particularly a grammatically complex list: see the example below under *semi-colon*
- To introduce a direct quotation, particularly a long one: *Jones (2003) states that: ' '.*

### 4. Semi-colon ;

- To separate two sentences that are very closely connected in meaning (optional, in place of a full stop): *Some students prefer to write essays; others prefer to give presentations.*
- To separate clearly items in a grammatically complex list: *For Aristotle, motion is of four kinds: (1) motion which ....; (2) motion which ....; (3) motion which ....; and (4) motion which....*

### 5. Quotation marks ' ' / " "

- To indicate a direct quotation
- To highlight words or phrases used in a special or unusual way: *Quotation marks are also called 'inverted commas'.*

**NB** Single quotation marks now seem to be more commonly used than double. For quotations within quotations, use double quotation marks inside single (or single inside double).

### 6. Dash –

- Generally avoid in formal academic writing. Replace by colon, semi-colon, or brackets, as appropriate.

## A note on article use

Articles use in English is a very complex area. However, there are a few simple rules which will help you in many situations and these are explained below:

### 1. Singular countable nouns

All singular countable nouns are always preceded by a small modifying word known in grammar as a determiner, and this is often an article (*a/an, the*). Countable words which are common in academic writing and which cause problems for non-native speakers of English, include: *system, model, method, approach, group, problem, effect, level, investigation, sector, study, participant, condition, category*

Note that even if these words are preceded by uncountable nouns or adjectives a determiner is still needed:

- *the greenhouse effect, the transport system, the control group*
- *a high level, a systematic approach, a rigorous study, an exploratory investigation*

### 2. Plural countable nouns

If the writer is thinking about a specific group, then the definite article is normally used: *The books in this collection were published in the 19th or early 20th century.*

Otherwise no article is used:

- *Learners tend to remember new facts when they are contextualised.*

### 3. Uncountable nouns

Uncountable nouns are not normally accompanied by an article:

- *Science has been defined as a systematic approach to answering questions.*
- *Reliability* is an important quality of any test.

But if they are post-modified by *of....., or which ...* the definite article is normally used:

- *The science of global warming is a complex and controversial area.*
- *The reliability of this instrument is poor.*
- *Chemistry is the science which addresses the composition and behaviour of matter.*

#### **4. Names**

Names and titles are not normally preceded by the definite article (*the*)

- *Manchester University, Manchester*

But this changes if the noun phrase contains a post-modifying structure (*of ....*)

- *The University of Manchester; The United States of America*

or if they contain words like *organisation, association or institute*

- *The World Health Organisation, The American Heart Association, The Royal Society. The SETI Institute*

Apart from these simple rules, the other thing you need to do is to check how noun phrases are used in the texts that you read. Make a mental note of this as you read, or check back to the source text when you are writing.

## A note on sentence structure

### 1. Simple sentences

In written English, all sentences contain a Subject → Verb structure. The subject always precedes the verb, except in questions where the order is reversed.

| S                  | V         |
|--------------------|-----------|
| <i>An electron</i> | <i>is</i> |

The subject may be one word, but it is usually a group of words centred around a noun. The verb, which can indicate an action, a state, or simply serve to link the subject to other information, may also consist of more than one word. Various other sentence elements may be placed before or after the Subject → Verb structure:

| S  | V                                       |
|--|---|
| <i>Between 1933 and 1945, restrictions</i> | <i>were placed on German academics.</i> |

It is common for the subject to consist of many words:

| S   | V   |
|---|---|
| <i>The information on various types of wasps and bees in the report</i> | <i>was useful to environmentalists who were fighting the use of pesticides.</i> |

Sometimes, however, the subject and verb can just be one word each:

| S         | V   |
|-----------|---|
| <i>It</i> | <i>is almost certain that a lower speed limit will result in fewer injuries to pedestrians.</i> |

These simple sentences always end in a full stop. In academic writing, however, many sentences are more complicated than this simple pattern.

### 2. Complex sentences

Many sentences contain more than one Subject → Verb structure, but one of these parts (known grammatically as clauses) will convey the main meaning and will make sense by itself:

| Dependent part  |   | Main part                    |                            |
|---|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| S   | V | S                            | V                          |
| <i>Although findings of recent research have shown X,</i> |   | <i>no controlled studies</i> | <i>have been reported.</i> |

The main part of the sentence is also known as the independent part.

The main part of the sentence can also be placed before the dependent part.

| Main part             |                           |  |   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
| S                     | V                         |  |   |
| <i>Oral societies</i> | <i>tend to be</i>         | <i>more concerned with the present</i> |   |
| Dependent part        |                           |  |   |
| S                     | V                         |  |   |
| <i>whereas</i>        | <i>literate societies</i> | <i>have</i>                            | <i>a very definite awareness of the past.</i> |

The dependent part of complex sentence is usually preceded by a word or phrase such as: *although, even though, if, even if, when, because, as, since, whereas, while*.

### 3. Compound sentences

Some sentences may have two Subject → Verb structures and both of these convey meaning that can make sense by itself; in other words, there are two main parts. The two parts may be joined by words like *and, or, but, so*, or by using a semi-colon (;) .

| S  | V                    |  |
|--|----------------------|--|
| <i>Supporters of the 'Great Divide' theory</i> | <i>agree</i>         | <i>that something is lost as well as gained when people become literate,</i> |
| <i>but</i>                                     | <i>they consider</i> | <i>it is worth losing some benefits in order to obtain many others.</i>      |

### 4. Common problems relating to sentence structure

Problems occur in writing when dependent parts of sentences are written as complete sentences with a full stop:

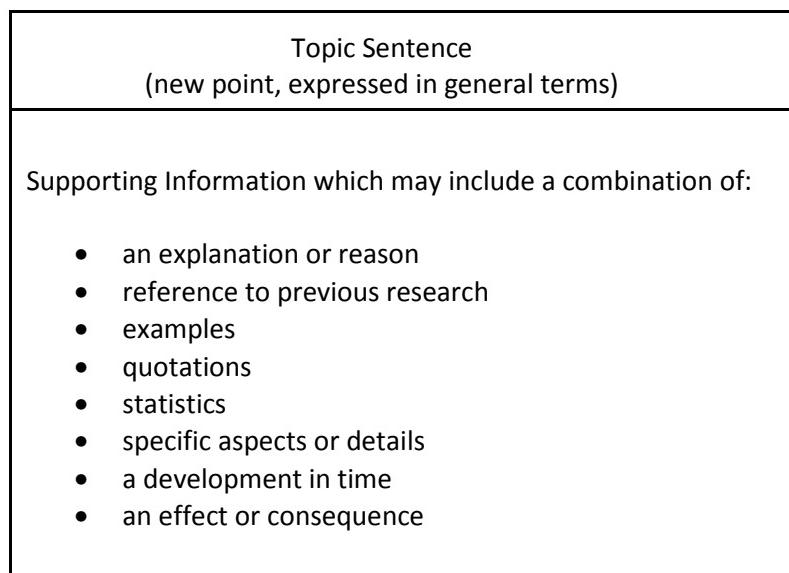
- *Whereas literate societies have a very definite awareness of the past.* X
- *Although a number of studies have been undertaken.* X

Problems also occur when two independent parts are written as one sentence without a joining word.

- *Supporters of the 'Great Divide' theory agree that something is lost as well as gained when people become literate, they consider it is worth losing some benefits in order to obtain many others.* X

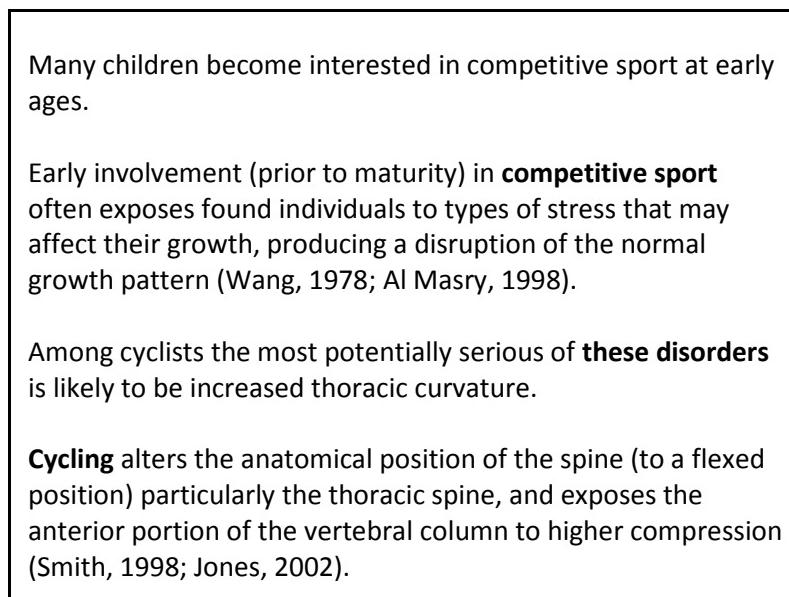
## A note on paragraph structure

A pattern that can be identified in many well-written paragraphs is that of a controlling idea followed by supporting information. The controlling idea, sometimes referred to as the *topic sentence*, introduces a new idea, topic, argument or piece of information into the main text. This is then either explained further or supported by subsequent sentences. This structure can be represented schematically thus:



It is important that the explanatory or supporting information in a paragraph should relate to the topic sentence. If new points or ideas are to be stated, then these should be treated in a separate paragraph. It is also important that the explanatory or supporting information should not repeat the general ideas expressed in the topic sentence.

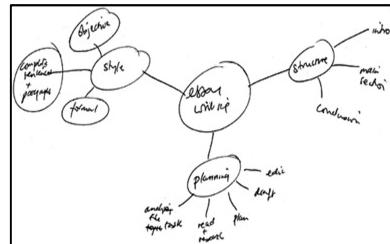
An example of the kind of paragraph structure suggested above is given below. Note the development from the general idea to the more detailed information. Also note the thematic linking, which is signalled by the words in bold, between the sentences. Each of these words and phrases links back to an idea introduced in the previous sentence. Here, the sentences have been separated.



## A note on the writing process

So far this document has been about ‘what we write’. This final section comprises a set of notes which are concerned with ‘how’ we write. It is organised into a series of helpful tips. Although only two pages are devoted to these ideas, together they have the potential to make a significant deference to the quality and quantity of your written output.

**Tip No. 1. The importance of planning:** Research has shown that experienced writers plan extensively. Initially, planning may involve simply generating ideas and exploring the relationships between them schematically, as in the diagram to the right. At a more advance stage of the planning process, a chapter outline of the thesis or dissertation will be necessary. This will become more detailed as you work on your study. You need to think of a writing plan as a road map. Without a map, you will probably lose your way or travel in circles.



**Tip No. 2. Getting started:** Many writers suffer from ‘writers’ block’; they find it difficult to get started. One way of overcoming this is to give yourself a short period of time (say four minutes), and without stopping, write whatever comes into your mind about the topic. The important thing to do is to keep writing, or if you are using a keyboard, to keep typing. Don’t worry about spelling of grammar – just keep producing words. You will be surprised at how much text you will produce and how many ideas are generated in such a short time. Now you can begin to organise the ideas you have produced, ensuring that they are written in logically developed and grammatically correct sentences.

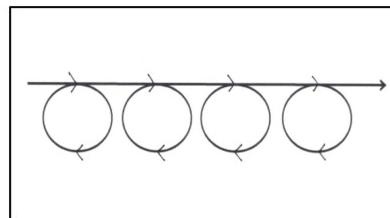


**Tip No. 3. Be regular:** You should timetable yourself so that you have a regular daily writing slot. This may seem obvious, but it is fundamental to ensuring the production of written text. Timetable a writing period each day, and aim to produce some text every time. How much you produce will vary, and what you produce, even if it is just a few paragraphs, may only be in the initial draft stage. This is not so important. The important thing is that the writing becomes a part of your daily routine. Simply getting your body to sit in front of a computer at a certain time each day will produce results.

**Tip No. 4. Keep a notebook:** When we are writing up a major piece of work, many ideas and insights come to us when we are not actually writing. Often, some of the most insightful ideas emerge when we are in a non-focussed cognitive state, such as when we are walking, running or swimming. Unless you can capture these ideas soon after they come to you, they may be lost. A small notebook and a pen is probably the best way to capture these thoughts before they disappear. The notebook itself can become a place where you develop the ideas and even start to formulate how the ideas will be developed in textual form.



**Tip No. 5. Understand the recursive process:** Writing at the academic level is not something we can do once and then leave. It is a recursive process. This means writers return to their initial texts, revising and redrafting them. This process is ongoing. In fact, many writers find it difficult to stop improving their writing, but with time being limited, they try to do as much as they can before the onset of a particular deadline. One thing we do know: successful writers write initial drafts, redraft, work on final drafts and then edit their work.



**Tip No. 6. Stand back from your writing:** Think of yourself as a mountain climber. Most climbers, during a climb, can only see a few feet in front of their faces. They cannot see the whole mountain. They can see other mountains, but not the one they are climbing. To do this they need to move a few kilometres away. At such a distance, they can see the route they are planning and they can see how their planned route moves up the mountain. As a writer, you should ask yourself: Is the route to the 'top' unbroken? Do all the minor 'steps' move upwards? Can the minor 'steps' be 'carried out' more clearly? The best way to create a sense of distance with your writing is with time: Leave it a few days, or longer, and comeback to your writing with fresh eyes and with a better sense of the overall structure.



**Tip No. 7. Read your own writing:** Read what you have written back to yourself, out loud if necessary, and ask yourself: i) do I understand what I have written? ii) does it sound natural? Reading your text out load is actually the best way of checking this. If what you have written doesn't sound right to you when you do this, it is probably badly written. One famous French writer (Gustav Flaubert) used to shout out his manuscripts before sending them off to be published. He claimed that bad writing never passed this simple test.

**Tip No. 8. Talk about your writing:** Writing is a very solitary activity and we tend not to talk about it to others. This is quite strange given that we spend so many hours on this activity. Asking another person to read some of what you have written and to give feedback can be a very useful experience; particularly if the feedback is reciprocal and both of you receive constructive criticism. It is worth bearing in mind that academic writers often receive their papers back from journal editors or publishers asking them to make changes. You might also consider forming a group of writers like yourself. Together you can read each other's writing and share the feedback.